The Meaning of The Apocalypse

E. H. HORNE

PROPERTY OF
THE CHURCH ON THE WAY

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The meaning of the apocalypse or Revelation of St. John.

THE MEANING OF THE APOCALYPSE

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OF

THE APOCALYPSE

OR

REVELATION OF ST. JOHN

A STUDY FOR THE TIMES

BY

EDWARD H. HORNE, M.A.

Rector of Garsington

AUTHOR OF

"DIVINE CLUES TO SACRED PROPHECY"

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches."—REV. ii. 7.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

In a study of the Apocalypse extending over many years, the author has made use of most of the Commentaries that are available in English. The result is summarised in the following pages, which owe much to earlier writers, but do not follow any one writer closely enough to call for special acknowledgment.

The arrangement of the book, in which a continuous "Outline of Interpretation" is followed by a series of long "Notes" on special points, is chosen as best suited to a prophecy which must be read as a connected whole, if its meaning is not to be missed. The "Notes" are not an afterthought, but are an integral part of the book. Each is complete in itself, and no attempt has been made to avoid the slight repetition involved in the arrangement.

For the benefit of non-classical readers, all references to Greek words have been confined to the Notes.

It is only fair to the Publishers to say, that the style of the book, which is rather that of a school-book, is the author's choice: the book is intended for students, rather than for the general reader. The desire to publish during Advent, after some earlier delays, accounts for some imperfections, for which the author is alone responsible.

The "Advent Prayer" has appeared in the "Record," and is reprinted by permission.

December, 1915.

"*The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.*"—Deut. xxix. 29.

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Not to the wisdom of the world the prize
That proves most precious. To the opened eyes
That look for God and find Him: to the ear
Tuned to the heavenly note that fills the world
But scarce is heard for noise: and to the heart
That gives Him welcome,—there is such reward
As passes not with time, nor ever fails:
The peace, the presence, and the voice of God.
Not God in heaven, far away, unheard;
But God in His own world, Who speaks to men,
Who shows Himself, Who works in wondrous ways,
Who cares for each and seeks for all; Who waits;
Whose age-long purpose moves towards its goal,
Of final revelation, and meanwhile
Allows, to waiting eye and listening ear,
A glimpse, a whisper,—an Apocalypse.

CHAPTER I.

The Origin, Purpose, Contents, and Style of the Apocalypse.

1. *The Origin of the Book.*

"The Revelation of St. John the Divine," as our Book is described in the Authorised Version, is one of the best authenticated Books in the Bible.

Justin Martyr, who wrote about A.D. 140, refers to it thus:

> "There was a certain man with us whose name was John, one of the Apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a Revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ should dwell a thousand years at Jerusalem, and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men should likewise take place." (Dialogue with Trypho, sec. 81.)

Justin Martyr thus definitely assigns the Book to St. John the Apostle; and his memory must have reached to the time when St. John was still living. It has been noticed that though he constantly refers to the Apostles in his writings, this is the only place in which he refers to any one of them by name.

Irenæus, who wrote some forty years later, confirms the testimony of Justin Martyr and adds to it. He often refers to St. John the Apostle, and to the Apocalypse as written by him. Speaking of the Number of the Beast, and the name of the enemy whose identity is concealed under it, he says:

> "If it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign." (*Against Heresies*, bk. v, chap. xxx. sec. 3.)

Thus Irenæus fixes the date of the Book as A.D. 95 or 96. He could scarcely be mistaken on such a question: for he says elsewhere, in a letter to a friend, that he has a vivid memory of his early days, and of his association with Polycarp, who had himself been intimate with St. John. And his testimony is all the more valuable, as being quite incidental, a mere allusion to what must have been, at that time, a matter of common knowledge among Christians.

With its Apostolic origin thus clearly established, the Apocalypse was at once received into the New Testament, in spite of the unique character of its contents. No Book in the Bible has more unanimous acceptance in the writings of the early Fathers.

It was only when the contents of the Book began to be misapplied, especially by Millennarians, that the authority of the Book itself was questioned. Dionysius of Alexandria, who wrote

about A.D. 240, was its first prominent opponent: and his arguments against its Apostolic origin are based entirely on the nature of its contents. He ignores the historical testimony altogether.

From his time to our own, there have been advocates, now and again, of a non-apostolic origin, or of an earlier date, for the Book. They have invariably relied on similar arguments, and have passed over the solid evidence of Christian antiquity.

Modern writers of the German school object to the Book on rationalistic grounds, and adopt the same attitude as Dionysius towards the historical evidence. They argue entirely from the contents of the Book, and rely mainly on three suppositions :—

(1) That the *seven kings*, in the seventeenth chapter, are seven of the twelve Roman Emperors.

(2) That the *Temple of God*, in the eleventh chapter, is the Temple at Jerusalem, which must therefore have been still in existence.

(3) That the Beast *that was, and is not, and shall arise*, is connected with the Nero-Fable, the fancy that Nero, though supposed to be dead, would come back with great power for evil.

These are, to say the least, extremely doubtful points of interpretation, and it is quite unreasonable to found upon them any theory as to the origin of the Book : especially when it contradicts the plain statements of the earliest writers, and the consent of the Fathers, to which critical scholars are now inclined to return.

It need only here be said, that in this outline of interpretation, no reference is found to individual Roman Emperors, or to a literal Temple at Jerusalem, or to the Nero-Fable.[1] The evidence of Christian antiquity is accepted, and the Book is treated as the work of St. John, written while in exile on the Isle of Patmos, in the year A.D. 95 or 96, during the reign of Domitian. Questions of interpretation are dealt with as they arise, and the Book is regarded as written mainly in symbolic language, and is interpreted in accordance with the usage found in other Books of the Bible.

2. *The Purpose of the Book.*

The Apocalypse has usually been forgotten in quiet times, and brought to the front in times of crisis. It has in this way had tremendous religious and political importance, especially during the great struggles with Pagan Rome and with the Papacy. One of the results of the present crisis may well be that the Book will have new power, and will "prophesy again" to a generation which is growing anxious about the future.[2]

The Book as we have it contains "the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants the things which must shortly come to pass": but it contains much besides.

This "Revelation of Jesus Christ" is clearly a revelation of *things then future*,—prediction, and nothing else. The first chapter, except for one

[1] The Nero-Fable is well dealt with by Archbishop Benson, in a long Appendix to his book on the Apocalypse.

[2] Rev. x. 11.

verse, contains no prediction: it is simply an introduction. The next two chapters contain no prediction; they are divine sermons, addressed to particular churches, then existing. They have not lost their value for us, because they are not directly addressed to us: but they are not predictive. They are no part of the "Revelation of Jesus Christ," of which the first verse of the Book speaks.

The fourth and fifth chapters contain no prediction of things future. They form together a grand setting for a particular symbolic action, —the taking of a seven-sealed Scroll, by Christ the Lamb, from the hand of God the Father, seated on the heavenly throne, with a view to the revealing of its contents. That action is evidently of importance in the vision, for it is followed by the grandest burst of praise in the whole Bible—the praise of every creature in heaven and earth. But the fourth and fifth chapters are no part of the "Revelation of Jesus Christ."

With the sixth chapter, the opening of the Scroll begins: that is, the revelation of its contents, by means of symbolic visions. The seals are broken, one by one; as each is broken, a vision is seen, revealing something of the contents of the Scroll. *The Scroll is thus seen to contain predictions of things then future.*

Obviously the seven-sealed Scroll is itself the "Revelation of Jesus Christ." The reader is not only allowed to see the Son receiving it from the Father's hand: but he can follow the revealing of its contents in prediction of things future, Seal after Seal, Trumpet after Trumpet, Vial after Vial, by means of a series of pictures,—

till the absent Lord returns as conqueror through an opened heaven, and the vision loses itself in the glories of eternity.

Thus the "Revelation of Jesus Christ," of which the first chapter speaks, forms only a part of the Book, and does not include, properly speaking, the first five chapters. It is the Seven-sealed Scroll: and the *signifying* of its contents to St. John,—that is, the revelation of them by signs or symbols,—begins with the sixth chapter, and continues to the end of the Book.

The purpose of the Book as a whole is thus seen to be the same as that of other Books of prophecy, with only this difference, that whereas, in most of the prophetical Books, the preaching of righteousness is more prominent than the prediction of things future, in the Apocalypse this is not the case. The main object of the Book is prediction: seventeen chapters are given up to it. Less than three chapters are occupied with the preaching of righteousness. Any exposition which fails to grasp this fact is on the wrong track, and can only mislead.

In Old Testament days, there was a succession of living prophets, speaking in God's name, but they came to an end with the death of Malachi. For four hundred years, the voice of prophecy was silent. During that time, the Book of Daniel, with its outline prophecies of the earthly future, took the place, for Israel, of a series of prophets, and kept alive the national faith in the providence of God. What the Book of Daniel was to the Jews, during those four hundred years, the Apocalypse was intended to be to the Christian Church, for a much longer period of Divine silence. It has spoken with a living voice to

each age in turn. The end of the dispensation, and the coming of the Lord, have always seemed near. The Apocalypse contains no obvious notes of time: its days may be literally meant, or they may be symbols of longer periods; fulfilment alone can decide. The numbered symbols are in three separate groups, which may be parallel, or they may be continuous. To each age that has studied the Apocalypse, some light has been given: more and more, with the passing of the years. The reader has been kept watchful and expectant, cheered up with the glimpses of a final glory, and meanwhile conscious that God is overruling the destinies of His Church. Each section of the Book was understood at the time when it was most needed; and the prophecy, confirmed to us by fulfilments in the past, is still pointing onwards to-day to the Lord's triumphant return.

3. *The Contents of the Book.*

The Apocalypse is a complete whole, and shows no marks of corruption or mutilation. The prophecy it contains is divided into two unequal parts, the first homiletic, the second predictive. It is enclosed in a "covering letter" written by St. John to the seven churches of the small Roman province called Asia, which was probably St. John's sphere of activity in his old age. He states plainly that the Book is no work of his, but a faithful record of things seen and heard.[1] He puts his signature at the end, in solemn attestation. "I John saw these things and heard them.[2]

[1] Rev. i. 1, 2. [2] Rev. xxii. 8.

The things recorded were seen and heard *in vision*, but they were seen and heard none the less. The question of the nature of vision, or of this particular vision, does not affect the matter. Some visions recorded in Scripture were so objective that they could be seen by several people at the same time. This was especially the case with visions of angels:[1] and the Apocalypse is full of angelic appearances. Some visions, on the other hand, seem to have been connected with the mind, like dreams, which have no external existence. There are many examples of dream-visions in the New Testament.[2]

Questions of this nature do not affect the interpretation of the Apocalypse, provided the plain statement is accepted that *God gave the vision*, and that it was not the product of human imagination. St. John either recorded a wonderful vision given to him, through eye, or ear, or mind,—as he says he did: or else he composed the Book himself, as men write a drama,—which is incredible, in view of his own statements. In any case, an expositor must adopt one or other of these views. He cannot adopt both, and keep shifting from the one to the other, as is done by some well-known writers on the Apocalypse.[3]

It is worthy of notice, that the visions which make up the Book are of many kinds.

[1] Judg. xiii. 19, 20: Luke ii. 9, 10.

[2] *e.g.*, Mat. ii, 13, 19, 22.

[3] Thus Milligan, after accepting St. John's statement, that the Book is a *faithful record* of things seen and heard (p. 3), adopts throughout his commentary the opposite view, dwelling on "the Seer's imagination," his "main purpose," his "depth of insight," his "motive," and so on (pp. 364, 312, 63, 64). (Expositor's Bible Series.)

Those connected directly with seals, trumpets, and vials, are symbolic pictures, full of life and movement, associated with utterances on the heavenly stage, or from behind the scenes.

The vision of the tenth chapter has a more personal character, and St. John is himself called upon to take part in it.

The description of the two Witnesses, in the eleventh chapter, is not, properly speaking, a vision at all. Nothing is seen; there is only a record of words spoken with the authority of Christ Himself. The treatment of the subject in this case is exactly what might be expected, if the Witnesses are to be understood in the way suggested in this commentary.[1]

Wild-beast symbols, closely connected with the visions of Daniel, occupy several chapters, which stand apart from the rest, and are not definitely connected with the chain of numbered symbols,—Seals, Trumpets, and Vials,—but are parallel and explanatory.

Thus many forms of expression are used: symbolic pictures, angelic voices, the voice of Christ, succeed one another in what has appeared to many as hopeless confusion; and yet the whole is in reality so perfectly arranged, that to us who can look back on many centuries of Christian history, everything seems to fit into its place, in the stately progress of the most wonderful prophecy ever given to the world: and the conditions which began in A.D. 1914 only add new clearness to the understanding of the meaning of the Apocalypse.

[1] In the Outline of Interpretation.

To find this meaning, it is necessary that the Book should be studied with an open mind, free from assumptions as to what is, or is not, a proper subject of prophecy: patient attention to the divine clues which are provided for our guidance: and a readiness to judge the happenings of Christian history from the standpoint of the New Testament.

4. *The Style of the Book.*

The Apocalypse is written, like the rest of the New Testament, in Greek, but its style is not that of the other Books. It is full of Hebraisms, which connect it with the Old Testament. It is also full of examples of what would be called, in plain English, bad grammar. The rules of grammar are often broken, and treated as of no consequence. Ordinary usage is often disregarded in the use of verbs, and in the construction of sentences.[1]

This loose style is in sharp contrast with the perfection of the imagery, and the delicacy of the structure, of the Book. If St. John had deliberately composed so wonderful a drama, with its parts so perfectly fitted into one another, its progress so sublime, its unity so complete,—he would certainly have taken the trouble to write good Greek, for he knew how to do so, as his other writings show. But if, on the other hand, he was carried away in the spirit, and allowed to see and hear a heavenly drama, the work of God Himself,—then the grandeur and delicacy and completeness of the prophecy are natural

[1] Benson devotes 27 pages to a "grammar of ungrammar," in his comments on the Apocalypse (pp. 131-158).

enough, and the *ecstatic* style which cares little for the niceties of grammar and composition, so long as the record is a true one, and which *may not be corrected afterwards*,—is natural also.

There is no need to find "another John" as author, because the style is not that of the Apostle. The style is that of one who writes in the visible presence of God, and of divine beings: of one who is conscious of being literally "the pen of the Holy Ghost," whose personality has for the moment no scope for exercise, and only appears in a few words here and there, words that are his own,[1]—and in the humility which twice brings him to his knees in worship at the feet of the revealing angel.[2]

Jesus Christ is in fact the real author of the Apocalypse. The few verses written by St. John on his own account are easily distinguished, and if in the vision itself there are a few expressions peculiar to his writings,—such as the description of Christ as *the Lamb*, and as *the Word* or *Logos*, —this is rather an evidence of the close intimacy of the Beloved Disciple with his Master's thoughts, while still on earth, than an indication that he had any hand in the framing of the vision.[3]

[1] *e.g.*, Rev. i. 9, 17.

[2] Rev. xix. 10: xxii. 8, 9.

[3] "Apocalyptic Literature" is dealt with in Note A.

CHAPTER II.

The Language of Symbolism.

The opening words of the Revelation describe not only the object of the Book, and its origin, but its method of expression. The prophecy was to be *signified* to St. John by the revealing angel.

The word used for *signify* is used three times by St. John in his Gospel. In each case it is connected with words spoken by Christ, and is used in the sense of *speaking figuratively*, so as to conceal the meaning.[1]

Our Lord is speaking of the manner of His death; He *signifies* it by saying that *if He is lifted up from the earth*, He *will draw all men unto Him*. No one could have guessed the real meaning of this, until after the crucifixion. It was a prophecy, concealed under a figurative form of expression. The word *signify* is used again, in another place, of the same figurative prophecy. In the third passage, it is St. Peter's death that is *signified*. He is to *stretch forth his hands, and another will gird him, and carry him whither he would not*. St. Peter could not guess the real meaning of our Lord's words, until He was himself led out to be crucified. He was not

[1] John xii. 33; xviii. 32; xxi. 19.

meant to ; the prophecy was concealed under a figurative form of expression ; and the figure which *signified* his crucifixion was not the same as that which *signified* the crucifixion of his Master.

From St. John's use of the word *signify*, the reader of the Apocalypse would naturally expect the prophecy to be expressed in figurative language, rather than in direct speech. The contents of the Book agree with this expectation ; and it is worthy of notice that three of its most striking figures,—the Woman clothed with the sun, the great red Dragon, and the Seven Vial-angels,—are each described as "a great *sign*."[1] The word used for *sign* in the Greek corresponds to the word used for *signify*.

The prophecy is in fact more than merely figurative ; it is written in the language of symbolism. That is, the figures used are not taken from the ordinary things of earth, but are, for the most part, elaborate and artificial creations, like those found in the visions of Daniel. The Wild-beasts, and the Locust-horsemen, for example, are obviously symbols having no real existence, but quite natural as part of a symbolic vision.

There is nothing strange in this use of picture-language, especially in an Eastern Book, like the Bible.

The most elementary forms of speech are made up of figures and similes, especially those derived from nature. These, by a gradual process, become part of a developed language, so regularly used that their figurative origin is often entirely forgotten. But the process is continuous.

[1] Rev. xii. 1 ; xii. 3 ; xv. 1.

New figures of speech are always being added, and these in their turn become absorbed. Thus the figurative element is never absent from human speech, and it is the freshest and most vigorous part of it.

While this is true of Western languages, like our own, it is far more noticeable in the languages of the East, which abound in figures appealing to the imagination. It is difficult to choose illustrations, on account of their abundance, even if our choice is limited to the Bible. It will be enough for the present purpose, if one passage is taken from the Old, and one from the New Testament.

A deputation waits upon the successor of Solomon, to express the grievances of an overtaxed people.[1] The question is serious and urgent, and requires plain speaking; yet the deputation makes use of a simile, twice repeated, when it complains of the "heavy yoke" which Solomon laid upon people. The answer suggested is even more remarkable. "My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." It was an answer which well illustrates the figurative cast of mind which has produced the languages of the East. The Old Testament is full of such passages.

In the New Testament also, the difficulty is only one of selection. The words of our Lord to the Jews at the end of His parable of the Husbandmen may be taken as an example.

[1] 1 Kings xii.

PROPERTY OF
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"The Kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."[1] That sentence is figurative enough, but it does not compare with what follows. "And he that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust." There is not only a change of figure from a kingdom and from husbandry, but a change to a symbolic style of speaking. The sentence is a parable, and not plain speech at all. It must be translated from the language of symbolism, before it can be understood; and expressed in some such way as this: *whoever will not believe in Christ will suffer loss, but whoever is found fighting against Him will be utterly destroyed.* The key is to be found in the Book of Daniel, in the Vision of the Great Image.[2]

This is only one illustration of the fact, that the New Testament, like the Old, is full of figurative language: of sentences and expressions which cannot be understood literally without making them absurd.

Figurative writing is found in the ordinary narrative; but prophecies, visions, dreams and parables, are often figurative from beginning to end.

The first prophecy, which relates to Satan and the Woman's "Seed" is highly figurative: "It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."[3] The prophecies of Balaam are full of figurative expressions that need translating into plain language.[4] The same is true of the

[1] Matt. xxi. 43, 44. [2] Dan. ii. 35. [3] Gen. iii. 15.
[4] Num. xxiii. and xxiv.

utterances of the Hebrew prophets. Their poetic form is in keeping with their highly figurative contents.

So in the New Testament, the parables of our Lord are all of them in the language of *simile*: things of everyday life used as illustrations of things connected with God and the unseen world. This is a form of expression which is simple and primitive, and makes its appeal to readers in every age and country; but it is not to be taken literally. It needs translating, interpreting. "The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the Kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels."[1] Thus does our Lord provide a glossary or key to the understanding of one parable: He explains also the parable of the Sower;[2] but He leaves the reader to find out for himself the meaning of all the rest.

The visions and dreams that are recorded are even more figurative than the parables. St. Peter saw in vision wild-beasts of every kind, and was instructed that his Jewish prejudices, as to clean and unclean, must be put aside.[3] But he found that the wild-beasts represented mankind: the clean and unclean, Jews and Gentiles; and that he was to preach to both alike.[4]

The same thing is found in the case of the dreams connected with the story of Joseph. In his first dream, sheaves of corn, bound by his brothers and himself, represented by their move-

[1] Matt. xiii. 38, 39. [2] Matt. xiii. 18-23. [3] Acts x. 9-16. [4] Acts x. 28.

ments those who bound them—with the added meaning, realized long afterwards, that it was the need of corn that would bring the brothers humbly to Joseph's feet.[1] In his second dream, sun, moon, and stars represent the rulers, greater and lesser, of his tribe—his father, mother and brothers.[2]

Three branches on a vine, seen in the dream of Pharaoh's butler, are symbols of three days.[3] Three baskets, seen in the dream of Pharaoh's baker, are also symbols of three days; and in the dreams of Pharaoh himself, seven cows, and seven ears of corn, are each of them symbols of seven years of his reign.[4]

In such cases as these, there is much more than the figurative style so commonly found throughout the Bible. They are examples of the language of symbolism, definitely used, appealing through the eye to the mind, and never intended to be taken literally.

The language of symbolism is freely used in the prophecies of Ezekiel and of Zechariah, but most of all in the Book of Daniel. In that Book, there are found not only whole chapters written in symbolic language, but a key to the language of symbolism, provided in the form of a full interpretation.

A great image, seen in a dream by the king of Babylon, is explained as a prophecy of great earthly kingdoms, from that time onward.[5] Wild-beast symbols, elaborately constructed, seen by Daniel himself in vision, are explained

[1] Gen. xxxvii. 7. [2] Gen. xxxvii. 9.
[3] Gen. xl. 10-12. [4] Gen. xli. 1-7, 26.
[5] Dan. ii.

as predicting the history and destiny of the same great powers.[1]

Wild-beast symbols, almost identical with one of those in Daniel's vision, are found in the Revelation. Explanations are given there, as in the earlier case, by an angel, so that there can be no mistake. Whole chapters of the Apocalypse are thus seen to be written in the language of symbolism, for these wild-beast symbols, in their manifold changes, are their chief subject. To take these chapters literally would be absurd.

It would be equally absurd, and contrary to the usage of the whole Bible, to take literally the symbolic pictures which make up the other chapters of the central part of the Apocalypse. Death and Hell do not ride on horseback, except in the language of symbolism.[2] If, in any literal sense, the stars were to fall to earth, and heaven were to be removed—as in the sixth Seal—the men of earth would scarcely be in a position to hide themselves in caves, or to let their voice be heard.[3] Locusts which eat no green thing, and only injure men who are without a particular mark, which are like horses and yet have the heads of men, which wear breastplates and have stings, cannot be treated as anything but elaborate symbols of some conquering horde that breaks out upon the world.[4] Four Angels who resolve themselves into armies of horsemen, breathing fire and smoke, wearing breastplates, and having stings, must be interpreted in the same way.[5]

[1] Dan. vii. and viii. [2] Rev. vi. 8.
[3] Rev. vi. 13-16. [4] Rev. ix. 3-11.
[5] Rev. ix. 15-19.

These, and a score of other figures found in the Apocalypse, can only be understood when they are regarded as expressing earthly realities —such as persecutors, or nations, or armies—in the language of symbolism. And if these are symbols, then the Apocalypse itself, in its central chapters, is written in symbolic language, and must not be literally understood.

This conclusion is in entire agreement with the statement made in the opening words of the Book, that the Revelation of Jesus Christ was signified, or symbolised, to St. John.

The study of symbolic language, as used in the Bible, is a first step towards the understanding of the prophecy which the Apocalypse contains. God has not left the reader to puzzle out the meaning without definite guidance. Every part of the Bible contributes something towards the explanation of Apocalyptic symbols.

Thus the story of Joseph, to which reference has been made, explains the use of sun, moon and stars as being symbols of central, secondary, and inferior authorities in the world of men. That is their meaning in the Revelation, wherever they occur. So also the use of symbols of time—branches, cows, ears of corn—prepares the reader for time-symbolism in the Revelation: and from Ezekiel comes the definite indication that a day is sometimes used by God as a symbol for a year.[1] The mark put by God upon Cain the murderer, that he might not be killed, though driven into exile, explains the meaning of the mark ("a seal of God") put upon the Jews, the murderers of

[1] Ezek. iv. 4-6. See Note G.

Christ, that they might still survive, as a people, during their long time of banishment among the nations.[1]

But in this matter of symbolism the greatest help is given by the Book of Daniel. The earlier visions in that book are so fully interpreted by divine authority, and some of the symbols are so obviously connected with those of the Revelation, that the parts which would have been the most obscure become perfectly clear; and by their clearness they do much to open up to the reader the rest of the Book, and decide its meaning.

The Revelation, though written in the language of symbolism, was meant to be understood, at least in these last days. Its prophecy is not sealed.[2] The study of it, with open mind, and in the light of Christian history, confirms the prophetic authority of the Book of Daniel, proves the complete foreknowledge of God, and places in the hands of the Christian a weapon for the defence of faith, and a clear guide for the avoidance of mistaken paths.

[1] Gen. iv. 9-15; Rev. vii. 1-8.

[2] Rev. xxii. 10.

CHAPTER III.

The Structure of the Book.

It has been already shown that the *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, properly speaking, is the Revelation of the Seven-sealed Scroll, which occupies the last seventeen chapters of the Book.

The arrangement of the first three chapters, and their purpose, are clear enough. The fourth and fifth chapters are to be read together, and provide a worthy setting for the introduction of the *Revelation of Jesus Christ.* It is only in connection with the later chapters that questions of structure become important.

These seventeen chapters form a single prophecy of things future to St. John's day, reaching from that age to the end of time. They are crowded with symbolic figures, words and actions. Order and method must be found in them, or they cannot be understood at all.

It is necessary that the reader should make use of all the clues which God has provided.

One such clue, which will be considered first because of its wide scope, is connected with the several dispensations of God's providence in His dealings with mankind. A wide subject must here be touched upon in a few words.

God's method in creation, whether judged from the standpoint of Genesis, or of geology, was

certainly not continuous. There were new beginnings, in which creative power was active, succeeded by periods of natural growth, or even of natural development. Each period was separated from the next by a crisis, brought about by a new exercise of creative power. Each period brought the world to greater perfection for God's purposes. Each period was a "day," long or short, with a beginning and an end, an evening and a morning.

God has followed the same method in redemption that He followed in creation. His *days* are in this case commonly known as *dispensations*. The Flood ended one of them: the Plagues of Egypt another: but these were minor dispensations. Each dispensation has begun with a new exercise of power, not in creation, but in miracle: the beginning, in each case, of a new and nearer relation between God and man.

The most important ending and beginning was the Incarnation of the Son of God. Christ himself points this out very clearly, when He draws a sharp distinction between the spiritual conditions before and after His mission in the world.[1] That was the beginning of a new dispensation; and the miracles connected with it were the evidences of the birth of a new age, in the purposes of God.

These considerations have an important bearing on the structure of the Apocalypse. In that comprehensive prophecy, the outlines of four great dispensations can be distinguished.

The first is the Mosaic dispensation, which is seen only in its ending.

[1] Mat. xi. 11-14.

It was ushered in by the miraculous events connected with Egypt, Sinai, and the Desert-wanderings. It came to an end when Christ died upon the Cross, with the words upon His lips, "*It is finished.*"[1] They had a wider meaning than is generally assigned to them.

The Mosaic dispensation was ended: the dispensation of the Spirit was beginning. *Heaven was opened* towards men. Not only did Christ come down from heaven,[2] but at His baptism, John saw the heavens opened, for the coming down of the Spirit;[3] and at the death of the first martyr, the heavens were opened to his vision.[4] And when Christ predicted the beginning of a new age, as the result of His Ascension, it was in words connected with an opened heaven; "hereafter ye shall see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."[5]

In the Apocalypse, these two features are found in several places: the divine announcement, "*It is done*," and the *opening of heaven.* They are in each case connected with the beginning or end of a dispensation. They serve to mark out the division of the prophecy into three parts:

(1) This Present age: Rev. iv. 1: Rev. xvi. 17.

(2) The Millennial age: Rev. xix. 11: Rev. xxi. 6.

(3) The Eternal age: Rev. xxi. 2.

The part relating to this present age is found between the *opened heaven* of the fourth chapter,

[1] John xix. 30. [2] John iii. 13. [3] Mat. iii. 16.
[4] Acts vii. 56. [5] John i. 51.

and the "*It is done*" of the sixteenth: the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters being added as an explanatory appendix.

The part relating to the Millennial age is found between the *opened heaven* of the nineteenth chapter, and the "*It is done*" of the twenty-first chapter.

The part relating to the Eternal age begins from the great changes, which are much more than the mere opening of heaven, described in the twenty-first chapter. Heaven takes the place of earth: the Holy City descends: and the age begins that has no end.

Thus a clue is provided to the structure of the prophecy as a whole. It should save the reader from many mistakes. He will not, for example, find an allusion to the end of the age at the end of each paragraph. He will not look for the gathering of Gog and Magog before the Lord's return.

A second clue to the structure of the Book is to be found in the numbered series of Seals, Trumpets, and Vials. There are three groups of seven, and it can be shown, from the way in which they are interwoven, and apart from any question of their meaning, that they are intended to form a single chain of twenty-one links.

This fact is important, and worthy of close attention. It has not always been recognised. As the Apostles were allowed to overlook the prophecies of the calling of the Gentiles, until God actually began to fulfil them,—so the earlier students of the Revelation were allowed to overlook the fact that the Seals, Trumpets, and Vials, form a single chain. They supposed them to be parallel to one another, and to cover the

same period ; and they were thus still able to look for the Lord's speedy return. The students of our own day, with long centuries of Christian history to guide them, have come (many of them) to a sounder conclusion, and recognise that the three series form but a single chain, and that we have almost reached the end of it.

The Seals come first in order. Between the sixth and seventh Seals, two visions are interposed, the first of which looks *forward*, the second *backward*.[1] This inversion of the natural order has a definite purpose. It links the Trumpets to the Seals, as succeeding them in order.

The first of the interposed visions shows the sealing of the tribes of Israel for preservation in a time of danger. The occasion of danger, —the only one mentioned in the prophecy,—is found under the fifth Trumpet, when only those who have been sealed escape from injury. From the position of the sealing, between the sixth and seventh Seals, it is clear that the fifth Trumpet is in any case later than the sixth Seal.

The second interposed vision, which shows the reward of Christian martyrs of the Seal-period and is followed at once by the seventh Seal, is a link which binds the seventh Seal to the sixth, as following it in order of time.

When the seventh Seal is opened, there is a short period of silence, during which the seven Trumpet-angels are seen waiting.[2] It has been well said, that if the seven Trumpets do not follow as a part of the seventh Seal, that Seal

[1] Rev. vii. [2] Rev. viii. 2.

brings in nothing but a half-hour's silence. The proper "contents" of the seventh Seal would seem to be the short vision of the Censer-Angel:[1] but that vision comes *after* the appearance of the seven Trumpet-angels. The Trumpets are thus, by several links of structure, linked on to the end of the Seals, and must follow them in order of time.

Similar linking is found at the end of the Trumpets, making it clear that they are followed by the Vials.

The seventh Trumpet is sounded, and there follows (except for a chorus of praise) only the opening of the sanctuary in heaven, and voices and thunders which suggest troubled times.[2] Three chapters follow which are evidently a parenthesis. They are complete in themselves; they contain no references to Seals, Trumpets, or Vials, but are connected rather with the visions of the Book of Daniel. The thread of vision is not resumed, until, in the fifteenth chapter, the sanctuary in heaven is again seen to be opened, and the Vial-angels are seen to come out of it, to fulfil their office.[3] The completion of the seventh Trumpet is delayed until the seven Vial-angels are seen, ready for their work; so that the Vials must needs follow the Trumpets in order of time.

Thus the three series follow one another, and form a single chain of twenty-one links, to guide the reader of the Apocalypse. It may be shown that they cover the whole period from the first Advent to the second.

For it is evident that the first Seal is, in some

[1] Rev. viii. 3-5. [2] Rev. xi. 15, 19. [3] Rev. xv. 5-8.

way or other, symbolic of the first preaching of the Gospel. Among all the influences, for good or ill, which form the subject of prophecy, no other than that of the Gospel of Christ can be rightly described as *conquering and to conquer.* "He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet."[1]

If it is clear that the first Seal begins from the first Advent, it is equally clear that the last Vial brings in the second Advent. There is a warning of that event under the sixth Vial, but nothing more.[2] It is the seventh Vial that leads to the proclamation, "*It is done,*" which closes this dispensation; and to the great events which in the nineteenth chapter (after the digression about Babylon) surround and introduce the returning King.[3]

A clue is thus provided, by means of the numbered series of Seals, Trumpets, and Vials, to guide the reader through the part of prophecy which concerns him most, because it relates to this present dispensation. It is the longest section of the Apocalypse, and occupies, with its attached visions, more than half of the Book. It is also the most highly figurative part of it.

By God's decree, the wisdom of which is not to be questioned, men are not allowed to know beforehand, except in rare and special cases, the earthly future. When therefore matters of earthly history are predicted, as in the Apocalypse, it is in the language of symbolism. They are not intended to be known in advance,—it would not be good for us,—but they may be recognised at or after the time of their happening;

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 25. [2] Rev. xvi. 15. [3] Rev. xvi. 17.

and the recognition becomes the strongest possible confirmation of Christian faith.

The meaning of the various parts of the prophecy will be considered in the outline that follows. In this place, a few matters connected with the form and arrangement of the prophecy have still to be mentioned.

(1) The three groups of numbered symbols resemble one another in their internal arrangement. In each group, the first four members are of the same nature, and are rapidly described in a few verses. They occupy altogether only eight, six, and eight verses respectively, in our Bible. The last three members of each group, on the contrary, have little in common, and are full and complicated. Interpretation must take account of these differences and resemblances, and of the relative space given to the separate visions.

That the resemblances between one group and another are a matter of form rather than of subject, is shown by a comparison of the fourth Trumpet with the fourth Vial. The sun is the subject in each case: but the effects produced upon it are exactly opposite.

(2) There are sections of the prophecy which are not directly connected with the chain of numbered symbols. They are, none the less, in their right places: and their position is the best guide to their interpretation. They include symbolic pictures, written in the language of Wild-beast symbolism, like the visions of the Book of Daniel. In one of them, the vision of the Woman and the Dragon, is found a key which, more than any other, helps to unlock the mysteries of the Apocalypse.

(3) Each of the three groups of symbols ends in

visions and utterances which suggest catastrophe: not indeed, in each case, the end of the age, unless the reader shuts his eyes to the common use of symbolic language in other parts of the Bible; but to times of crisis, war, and change. The prophecies relating to this dispensation are thus divided into three well-marked periods, separated by critical times. The history of Christendom has been actually so divided; and from this feature of Apocalyptic structure the conclusion may be reasonably drawn, that the present crisis, the greatest the world has yet seen, is the last, *because it is the third.* Whether it be long or short,—a matter beyond human knowledge,—it is probable that it will bring in the end of the age, and the second Coming of our Lord.

AN OUTLINE OF INTERPRETATION.

"Doubtless, a thread of perfect sequence runs throughout Divine Revelation, binding it into one sacred and flawless whole." So writes Christina Rossetti, in special connection with the Apocalypse. There is no part of Divine Revelation to which the words more directly apply. The Book is made up of a long series of complicated symbols, mysterious utterances, predictions of troubles, wars, and final victory. No part of Divine Revelation would be more mysterious than this, if there were not a *thread of sequence* running through it. The prophetical Books of the Old Testament are made up of separate fragments, which must be studied separately, and may even have to be re-arranged. The Apocalypse is a complete whole, with "a beginning, a middle, and an end." It was apparently given to St. John on a single Lord's Day;[1] though the writing of the Book in its present form must have taken a longer time.

A *thread of sequence*, helping to the understanding of the Book as a whole, is to be found in its general unity and progressiveness; but also, and more definitely, in its chain of numbered symbols.

The first three chapters do not so much need interpretation, as appreciation. They remain as sermons for all time.

The last three chapters are beyond interpretation. They are wonderful pictures of heavenly and eternal conditions, not yet to be understood.

[1] See Note B.

It is the central chapters that require elucidation. In them, earth and heaven, the present and the future, are strangely blended. They describe, for example, a "war in heaven," which is fought aud won by living men on earth, who are evidently Christian martyrs. They are full of complicated symbolic figures, and obscure symbolic actions.

There is need for guidance here, and it is not withheld. The chain of numbered symbols is attached to these particular visions. It has been already shown that the Seals, Trumpets, and Vials, are not parallel, as referring to the same period; but successive, making one long chain of three sections and twenty-one links. It has also been shown that they cover between them the whole of this present dispensation; the first Seal being associated with its beginning, the last Vial with its ending, at the Lord's return.

The clue thus provided opens up the meaning of the Apocalypse. It gives order and coherence to its parts. It shows that the central chapters have to do with the Christian dispensation, and indicates which part of those chapters may be taken as referring to our own time. It leads to the conclusion that the Apocalypse is arranged on the plan of a well-written history, which is orderly and progressive, without being strictly continuous.

In the outline of interpretation which follows, an attempt is made to explain the prophecy as an ordered whole, without dwelling on side-issues. Only the primary meaning is considered, for that is in the case of the Apocalypse the only meaning. There are not two applications, a foreground and a background, as in the case of some earlier

prophecies. The contents of the Book correspond with the description with which it opens. It is found to contain a comprehensive, definite, orderly prophecy of the present and the future, —and not a "fortuitous concourse" of great principles obscurely stated, a mere armoury of isolated texts, or a beautiful but hopeless enigma.

The Preface. (Rev. i. 1-3.)

The Book opens with a clear statement of the origin, nature, and purpose of the visions it contains. It has been shown that the *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, here spoken of, is in fact the seven-sealed Scroll seen in the fifth chapter, and revealed, from that point onwards, in a series of visions. Given by God the Father to God the Son, it was *signified* to St. John by the Holy Spirit,—for so we may understand the angel or messenger of Jesus Christ. We cannot therefore rightly ascribe to St. John even the details of the symbolism; all is of God. The *mind of the writer*, his *point of view*, his *principles of style*, his *anticipations*,—matters to which some modern writers attach great importance,—are altogether excluded from having any influence on the visions of this Book. In no Book of the Bible is the human element more conspicuously absent. Critics have found in it so little of St. John's style, that some of them have gone so far as to suppose another author. Though the writer claims to be only a recorder of things seen and heard, his privilege is a high one. He is chosen, as the beloved disciple, to deliver to the servants of God, in every age, the last messages of the Risen Lord.

If the three verses which form the preface to the whole Book had been written in the twentieth century instead of in the first, they could not have been better fitted to meet the objections, and correct the mistakes, of some prominent modern critics. Five points which are made clear in these verses may be noted.

(1) The *authority* which St. John claims for the Revelation is unique among the Books of the Bible. If there be degrees of inspiration, then the inspiration of this Book is the highest, because the most direct, of all.

(2) The *main purpose* of the Book is stated to be the prediction of future events. The Seven Epistles alone are non-predictive; and these are not, strictly speaking, a part of that prophetic "Revelation of Jesus Christ" of which the first verse speaks.

(3) The *language* of the Book is declared to be symbolic: for the Revelation it contains is revealed by signs, not plainly stated; and cannot therefore be literally understood, but must be interpreted. Such parts as are literal are easily separated from the rest.

(4) The *application* of the prophecies contained in the Book was "at hand" when they were given: for they related to things which were shortly to come to pass. As the Apocalypse certainly reaches into the far distant future, before it closes, it is doing no violence to this statement to make it mean, *must shortly begin to come to pass.* The fulfilment had in fact already begun, in St. John's day. It follows that the prophecy includes within its scope the long history of the Christian Church.

(5) The *profitable nature* of the Book is asserted, in the blessing pronounced on the readers and hearers of it. This blessing is repeated in another form at the close.[1] Those who have made a study of the Apocalypse have realised it, and have found it to be a blessing which is quite independent of the amount of success obtained by the reader in the understanding of the difficult problems which the Book presents.

It is strange that with these opening verses before them, thoughtful writers should be found who deal with the Revelation as if it were but half-inspired—a sort of early "Pilgrim's Progress," teaching spiritual truth in a way of St. John's devising; or consider it as merely presenting in a mysterious form moral and spiritual truths already taught by Christ and His Apostles in plainer language; or attempt a literal in place of a symbolical interpretation, on the wholly irrelevant plea that "God means what He says"; or apply all the predictive part of the Book to a dispensation still future. Yet all these points of view find advocates, whose books find readers: while on the other hand Christians are always to be found, who, in spite of the twice-repeated blessing on the student of the Apocalypse, consider any careful study of the Book as little better than a waste of time. It has been well said, that while Scripture calls prophecy a *light* in a dark place, to which Christians should give heed, popular theology considers it a *dark place*, which they should avoid.

[1] Rev. xxii. 7.

The Dedication. (Rev. i. 4-8.)

The preface ended, St. John passes to the dedication. The Book is not dedicated to the whole Church of Christ. God loves to deal definitely and personally with His servants; and it is in keeping with what we know of Him from earlier Scriptures, that this great prophecy of the ages should be sent, not to the whole scattered Church, but to one little group of seven local Churches, not one of which ever became important in Christendom: and that, in so sending it, it should be prefaced by a special, personal, pointed message to each of those seven churches, as if to warn them, and through them the whole Church, that while looking with interest into the mysteries of the future, we must not forget to serve Him in the present.

The seven Churches were chosen as those under the immediate care of St. John: but in the choice there is also an indirect reproof to later ages. The Risen Christ sends His last solemn messages, not to the great Churches of Jerusalem, or Rome, or Antioch, or Alexandria,—Churches destined in after days to dispute which was the greatest, until Rome was left supreme by the political extinction of her rivals—not to any of these Churches, but to the humbler Churches of the small province which bore the name of Asia. In dealing with Churches as well as individuals, God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble. And as the Christian Church has found its best-remembered lessons in the personal dealing of our Lord with individuals—with Nicodemus, or the Woman of Samaria, or St. Thomas, or St. Peter,—so have

Christians in all ages rightly considered as their own, and applied to themselves, the divine messages which set forth with perfect knowledge the good and evil of seven local Churches in St. John's day.

St. John sends the Revelation to these seven Churches in the form of an epistle. His dedication contains only one point which need be noted, as affecting interpretation,—the reference to Christ's Second Advent. Three details are mentioned in connection with that event. He will come with clouds; all men will see Him when He comes; the world will lament at His coming. These three statements occur also in a single verse of the prophecy on the Mount of Olives.[1] On that occasion, as afterwards before the High Priest, our Lord was obviously referring to the prophecy in the Book of Daniel, "One like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven," and applying it to His own return in glory.[2] A cloud received Him as He left the earth[3]: it is *with clouds* that He will return. Elsewhere in the Apocalypse, clouds are an indication of *divine authority*, in the figures with which they are connected.[4]

There is no hint in either passage of a separate and secret coming. The cloud-glory, the public manifestation, the world's terror, are closely associated, and form part of one great event, which is not to be divided. When Christ comes again, He will not come secretly, but in manifested glory; and He will not need to come in glory twice.

[1] Matt. xxiv. 30. [2] Dan. vii. 13. [3] Acts i. 9.
[4] Rev. xi. 12: xiv. 14.

A Vision of the Great High Priest.
(Rev. i. 9-20.)

With the ninth verse St. John begins his record. He begins it with one of those characteristic touches, which, for a reason which has been explained, are rare in the Apocalypse. The Book is so faithful a record of things seen and heard, that it is only in an utterance or action here and there that the author's character appears. The ninth verse contains such an utterance. The aged apostle, last and most highly-favoured of them all, is yet proud to confess himself the "brother and companion in tribulation" of the members of the seven Churches.

He first sees in vision the figure of the Lord Himself. Christ is seen, not now as King of kings, but as High Priest within the Holy Place. He is gloriously transformed, as on the Mount of Transfiguration, and St. John, though the most intimate of all who were admitted to His friendship on earth, cannot look on Him without fear. But He is only tending the "Seven Candlesticks,"—or rather, sacred lamps, holding in His hand the "Seven Stars": and in these symbolic actions He is showing, as St. John hears from His own lips, His pastoral care for every flock and every shepherd in the Church of which He is the unseen overseer.

This vision of Christ as High Priest is an introduction to the letters to the seven Churches. It contains at the same time symbols, hints, and explanations which are of great importance in the interpretation of later chapters.

(1) The *number seven* is here first seen in its

association with the Christian Church. As the number twelve is the number of Israel, so seven is the number of the Church. It is so used throughout the Apocalypse. Seven Churches, for this reason, stand naturally for the whole Church of Christ. Corresponding with these seven Churches, there are not only seven Angels of the Churches, but also seven Spirits, representative of the one Spirit present with all alike: for the Christian dispensation is the dispensation of the Spirit. The number seven disappears, and twelve takes its place, in the last two chapters of the Apocalypse: for in the days there described, Israel will have been restored: the broken branches, grafted again into "*their own olive tree*," will take the leading place so long forfeited through unbelief.[1]

(2) The *Seven Candlesticks*, used as a type of the Christian Church, are evidently contrasted with the one Candlestick which was a type of the Church of the Old Covenant. The Jewish Church was essentially one organisation, with one High Priest, one Temple, one Holy Place where God was pleased to dwell. One candlestick must represent it: the seven branches of that candlestick looking forward, in type, to the Christian Church that was to spring, as they did, from it. But the Christian Church itself needed another symbol. It was to be a Church for all the world, having no single local centre, needing no central organisation. It was to be a commonwealth of Churches, each complete in itself, and all bound together only by a common allegiance to the ascended Lord, the Head of the

[1] Note H.

Church. As a matter of history, this commonwealth of Churches has, to a large extent, shared the fate of many political commonwealths, in falling under the power of one of its members. Church history is largely occupied with the rise, progress, and decline of the despotic power of the Bishopric of Rome over the other Bishoprics and Churches of Christendom: and, as might be expected, the subject finds a place also in the prophetic outline of Christian history which the Revelation supplies. It is not by God's appointment that any one Church should rule over the rest. The Churches of Christendom, like the Seven Candlesticks which symbolise them, are distinct in all but their common dependence on Christ, their invisible Head: and, as the sevenfold symbol used for the Holy Spirit shows, they share equally and independently the grace of God,—which knows no local limitation, and recognises no local centre.

It is important that the student of the Apocalypse, which deals so much with the history of the Christian Church, should regard that Church from God's point of view, not from man's. It is for this reason, doubtless, that the true constitution of the Church on earth is indicated thus early in the Book, in the symbol of the Seven Candlesticks.

(3) Two *identifying marks* occur in the Vision of Christ as High Priest, which link the subject of that Vision with the Rider in the nineteenth chapter. In each case the eyes are like a flame of fire, and a sharp sword proceeds out of the mouth. Even apart from these marks, mistake is scarcely possible: both must be figures of Christ, the Word of God.

(4) The *main divisions* of the Book are indicated in the nineteenth verse. It falls into three parts. First, there are things already described, the Vision of Christ among the Churches. Secondly, there are things having reference to the immediate present: the seven Epistles; divine sermons for those times. Thirdly, there are visions relating to a time then future—the real Apocalypse—the revelation of the Sealed Book. These are the natural, though very unequal, divisions of the Book of the Revelation.

(5) A *hint as to interpretation* closes the chapter. As the words of the first verse prepared the reader for symbolic writing, so do the words of the last verse prepare him for the interpretation of symbolic writing. The Revealer explains: the vision is not to be *literally* taken,but *figuratively*. The Candlesticks mean Churches: the Stars mean those placed over the Churches: the word *mystery* implying *symbolism* in the objects with which it is connected. While on earth, Christ carefully interpreted His first parable, that His disciples might understand all parables. So here, the Risen Christ interprets the first Vision, that Christians may be guided in their interpretation of the rest. If they fall into a foolish literalism, it is not for want of guidance, but for want of reverent attention to the Word itself. Christ gives here, at the outset, an example of interpretation: the treatment of the later visions of the Book should follow the lines He has Himself laid down.

The Seven Epistles. (Rev. ii. and iii.)

The Epistles to the seven Churches of Asia were messages from heaven to actual groups of Christians on earth in St. John's day. They served their immediate purpose: and they now remain—commended to all later ages by the words which form part of each: *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches*—as divine sermons for all times. They contain promises and warnings, but not predictions. They need application rather than interpretation: and their message has been well applied by many able writers. For the understanding of the meaning of the Apocalypse, they need only be considered as containing some *obscure allusions* which are difficult to explain, and some *valuable hints*, helping towards the interpretation of later and more difficult chapters.

I. The obscure allusions include references to (1) the Nicolaitanes, (2) a ten-days' tribulation, (3) the woman Jezebel, (4) the depths of Satan, (5) a world-wide hour of trial, and (6) the writing on a white stone of a new and secret name.

These allusions can only be partially explained, on account of our limited knowledge of the conditions of the seven Churches at the time of the vision. The early writers are by no means unanimous in the traditional explanations which they record.

(1) The *Nicolaitanes*, who are twice referred to,[1] were undoubtedly a sect of apostates, who

[1] Rev. ii. 6, 15.

did not follow Christ either in their teaching or in their lives, and yet claimed the Christian name. That is all that can be said with certainty ; and it is based upon the condemnation of their deeds and of their doctrine in these Epistles.

(2) The *tribulation of ten days*, which was to come upon the Church of Smyrna,[1] is obscure only in the sense that it cannot now be identified. Very little of the history of that Church has been preserved : little more than the story of the martyrdom of Polycarp ; and there is no record of a special persecution. Many fanciful explanations of the passage have been given. For example, the ten days have been supposed to refer to the ten persecutions made out by Church historians. It is clear, however, that only one persecution is spoken of here. Whether the time is to be understood *literally*, as ten days ; or *symbolically* (a day for a year), as ten years ; or *indefinitely*, as a short period—cannot now be determined with certainty. The last of these alternatives would seem to do violence to the passage ; the first is contrary to historical probability ; while the second has at least this to recommend it, that in the midst of so much that is figurative, the time-measurement may well be figurative also, and convey the same meaning as it does when it occurs in later chapters of the same Book.

(3) The *woman Jezebel*, at work in Thyatira,[2] was, of course, not a woman of that name, but some prominent false teacher, who, having found her way into the Church, resembled the Old

[1] Rev. ii. 10. [2] Rev. ii. 20.

Testament queen in her character, and in the harm she was doing to God's cause. By this figurative use of the name *Jezebel*, the reader is prepared for a similar use of the name *Babylon* in later chapters, and for the employment of *symbolism* in this Book, without express mention being made of the fact in each place where it occurs.

But the symbol of Jezebel seems here to be used in more than a personal sense. A woman of such a character, with her lovers and her children, could scarcely be tolerated as members of any Christian Church, in Apostolic times. Commentators have suggested that a dominant party in the local Church is symbolised, rather than a person. The *woman Jezebel* (or, as some of the oldest manuscripts have it, *thy wife Jezebel*), becomes then the symbol of an organised apostasy, troubling the Church in Thyatira by its claims and by its teaching: her *lovers* and her *children* symbolising the members who support it. The interpretation in that case follows the same lines as that of the *woman Babylon*, who is described and condemned, with her lovers and her children, in the seventeenth chapter.

(4) The *depths of Satan* is an expression which would seem to refer, from God's point of view, to the claims made by certain leaders in a false teaching akin to Gnosticism of later days.[1] The Gnostics, or "enlightened ones," set up an inner circle of those who, by initiation into certain mysteries, were supposed to have a deeper knowledge than others of spiritual realities.

[1] Rev. ii. 24.

Such deeper knowledge receives here, by a verbal change, its true name: it deals with the things, not "of God," but "of Satan."

(5) The *hour of trial* from which, or rather in which, the Church of Philadelphia was to be preserved,[1] cannot now be identified, owing to our ignorance of early Christian history. That its meaning lies in the past is clear; for the Church of Philadelphia has long since passed away. It was to come on "the whole world"; but it is only doing violence to the passage to make it include more than the "world" as the expression was then understood—that is, the Roman world.

The "hour of trial" will then stand for the general persecution of Christians which preceded the days of Constantine, and is predicted in the fourth Seal. It affected the whole Roman Empire: and it may be assumed, that in fulfilment of the promise here given, the Christians of Philadelphia in some way escaped its violence.

(6) The meaning of the allusion to a *white stone*, with a secret name inscribed upon it, in the promise to the Church in Pergamos, is quite lost to us.[2] It has been variously guessed at by many expositors, and true spiritual lessons have been found; but there is evidently an allusion to some custom of that day, of which no account has been handed down. Such an allusion is natural enough in an epistle primarily intended for a particular group of Christians at a particular time.

II. Secondly, there are found in the seven Epistles expressions and allusions which throw

[1] Rev. iii. 10. [2] Rev. ii. 17.

a flood of light upon the interpretation of later and more difficult chapters. These include (1) allusions to Satan, (2) allusions to sensual sins, (3) a reference to the Second Advent, (4) a reference to the "Temple of God," (5) an allusion to an "open door."

(1) The *allusions to Satan* are of great importance. In later chapters, Satan is often referred to, both directly and in symbol: and the help of these earlier and clearer allusions to his power is of great value to the expositor.

First, there is the statement that in Pergamos is Satan's dwelling-place and *throne*,—for that is the word in the Greek, both here and in a later chapter.[1] Evidently, in this passage, the expression cannot be taken literally, as referring to any place in the spirit-world. It must mean simply a centre of evil activity on earth, that is, of superstition and idolatry, with their associated evils. It is through these things that Satan leads men astray. The passage is a key to the meaning of the expression *Satan's throne*, as used in the Revelation: for the expression does not change its meaning, though the centre of evil activity to which later chapters refer is not Pergamos, but another and more famous city.

Again, of the Church in Smyrna it is said, "the devil shall cast some of you into prison."[2] All the seven Churches were within the Roman Empire; and none could be cast into prison except by the officers of the Emperor. Clearly, then, the actions of the servants of the Emperor are here, in a figure, attributed to Satan, because they are directed against Christ. Satan is put for the

[1] Rev. ii. 13; xiii. 2. [2] Rev. ii. 10.

Pagan Emperor: his name stands for that of *his human agent for the time being.* The matter is clear enough in this passage: and we may apply it in explanation of a similar figure in a later and more obscure chapter. A great red Dragon, a figure undoubtedly of Satan, is in the twelfth chapter shown lying in wait for the Man-child, who as certainly is Christ, born into the world.[1] But why should Satan have the marks —the seven heads and ten horns—of the fourth prophetic empire, the Empire of Rome? The earlier passage answers the question. Satan is put for his human agent; and the marks are there to identify that human agent, who happens to be the same in both passages,—the Pagan Roman Emperor. It was a deputy of Rome who tried to destroy the infant Christ. It was an officer of Rome who actually ordered His crucifixion; and Roman soldiers were His executioners. The meaning of the twelfth chapter is thus opened out to us: and it is opened by a key derived from the seven Epistles.

Once more, in two of the seven Epistles, the Jews are described as the *synagogue of Satan.*[2] Now it cannot be supposed that the communities so described did not consist of Jews in the ordinary sense. No others could well claim to be Jews, as these did, for a Jew was perfectly well known by his outward observances. Yet in God's sight these Jews were no Jews at all; were even *the synagogue of Satan*; because they were at that time the leaders in Satan's work, the most dangerous opponents of the Gospel

[1] Rev. xii. [2] Rev. ii. 9; iii. 9.

which they should have proclaimed. As the chosen Apostle, St. Peter, earned the name of "Satan" the moment he stood between Christ and His Father's will,[1] so does the chosen nation become "the synagogue of Satan" directly it becomes a real hindrance to the progress of the Gospel. For centuries past, the Jews have been powerless against Christ: but in those early days it was a different matter. The Gentile converts and enquirers were in danger of being unsettled by Jewish claims; for they knew that Christianity had come from Judaism. "We are true Jews—these Christians are renegades from our faith," would be an argument not easy for the Gentiles to answer. Even as late as the third century, Jewish opposition was serious enough to induce Cyprian to write elaborate "Testimonies" against them, drawn from Scripture. Christ Himself answers them in these Epistles. He says in effect, "These are not Jews at all, for they are standing in the way of the Gospel, and are thus actively doing Satan's work. They have made themselves his church, not Mine."

This identification of the Jews of that day with Satan's cause helps to explain what might otherwise have been a difficulty in later chapters. The Roman Church, which St. Paul thought worthy of an elaborate Epistle, is yet in the seventeenth chapter, which of course refers to later days, identified by no uncertain marks with the harlot Babylon. The case is exactly parallel with that of the Jews referred to in the seven Epistles. They never for a moment ceased to

[1] Mat. xvi. 23.

be the chosen people, under covenant with God : yet for one period at least of their history they were also the synagogue of Satan. The Roman Church has never ceased to be a Christian Church, professing the essentials of the faith, and containing a proportion of true Christians : yet for one period of its history it has been also the Babylon of the Apocalypse, the proud and corrupt oppressor of God's people. In each of the two cases, two quite opposite characters are found existing in the same community at one and the same time : a paradox which receives a further illustration in the individual case of St. Peter, to which reference has been made. For, while never ceasing to be the leading Apostle of Christ, St. Peter on one occasion at least so acted, as to receive from Christ Himself the name of Satan.

Thus the allusions made in the seven Epistles to Satan's throne, and to his political and *religious* activity—strange as the latter may appear—become a real help in interpretation : for they decide the relation between Satan and his human instruments, so far as it enters into the symbolic language of the Apocalypse.

(2) The *allusions to sensual sins* can scarcely be supposed, in these solemn and spiritual messages, to be intended only in a literal sense.[1] Such sins would exclude from the fellowship of the Christian Church, if openly indulged. There could be no mistake about their sinfulness in God's sight : more particularly as they were associated so commonly with the old idolatries which the Christians had forsaken. For this

[1] Rev. ii. 14, 20-22.

very reason, it would be natural to understand these allusions as expressing, in a figurative way, all that savoured of apostasy from Christ among those who had accepted Him. The prophets of the Old Testament frequently use similar gross figures to depict *spiritual* unfaithfulness and apostasy: and it was to spiritual apostasy that Jezebel—who is here alluded to by name—enticed Israel. Thus there is good reason for taking the references to sensual sins, which we find in the seven Epistles, as including spiritual apostasy, idolatry (with its associated impurity), and compromise with the world,—which in that day was a Pagan world. Such an interpretation not only gives a fuller meaning to passages in the seven Epistles themselves, but helps to explain the highly symbolic figure of *Babylon*, which is marked by the same gross sins, in the seventeenth chapter. It receives support also from an allusion of a different kind. Defiled garments can only be intended as figurative of a life that is unworthy of the Christian calling.[1] The figure is placed in sharp contrast with the white raiment which symbolises the righteousness which Christ bestows: the wedding-garment without which none can find a place in heaven.

(3) The words "*as a thief*," in the message to Sardis, and the explanation which follows them, throw light upon the important question of the nature of the Second Advent.[2] That event will of course have two aspects: to God's servants, it will be an unmixed blessing; to the world in general, a dread surprise. Scripture speaks so clearly of each of these aspects, that

[1] Rev. iii. 4, 5. [2] Rev. iii. 3.

some have supposed they will be separated in time one from the other :—that there will be, in fact, two separate "comings," the first secret, or at least unexpected, to take away (like a thief) the saints on earth ; the second, in manifested glory, to judge and reign. In support of this idea, much has been made of the expression "as a thief," on the supposition that it is used only of the first aspect, not of the second.

As a matter of fact, this is not the case. The message to Sardis is alone enough to disprove it. The reference is evidently to the second aspect only, the coming in judgment : and that is to be "as a thief"—the words that follow plainly showing that that expression means *unexpectedly*, and nothing else. The same is the case in the almost identical warning given on the Mount of Olives, where the words are not "as a thief," but "*as a snare*"—an expression which equally suggests unexpectedness, but does not suggest taking away.[1] In two other places, the same judicial aspect of the Second Advent is associated with the same figure. St. Paul says that the "day of the Lord"—that is, the new period ushered in by the Second Advent—will come "as a thief in the night," in other words, unexpectedly ; but he goes on to say that, though unexpected, it will be no surprise to the true servants of God, for they will be always ready for it.[2] St. Peter also says that the "day of the Lord" will come "as a thief" : probably quoting St. Paul.[3] His words also can only refer to the Second Advent in its judicial aspect.

[1] Luke xxi. 34, 35. [2] 1 Thess. v. 2-4.

[3] 2 Peter iii. 10.

Thus it is clear that no distinction can be made out, from the expression "as a thief," between the two aspects of the Lord's coming: for the expression is associated with the second *even more than with the first* of those aspects. There is in fact but one Second Advent, which, while coming unexpectedly upon all alike—inasmuch as the actual time is unrevealed—finds some prepared and some unprepared: some living the Christian life, and some living worldly and godless lives; for by our lives, rather than by our professions, will God judge "who are His and who is holy." And this is the great event, which is heralded in the sixteenth chapter in the words, "Behold, I come as a thief," and described in the grand symbolism of the nineteenth chapter.

It is highly significant, that in the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ—the full and final Christian prophecy, which is added, like a key-map, to gather into one all the separated threads of Scripture prophecy, and to show their relation to each other—no place should be found for the two "comings," which the modern theory of a divided Second Advent requires.[1]

(4) The *Temple of God*, referred to in the promise to the Church of Philadelphia, is obviously a symbol of the completed Church of God.[2] It is in this passage closely connected with the New Jerusalem; and no one has been unwise enough to make it *here* refer to the literal Temple of the Jews. Yet the same expression, when it occurs, in a later chapter, in surroundings far more symbolical than are the seven Epistles, has been taken literally by not a few

[1] Note D. [2] Rev. iii. 12.

writers; and used as a proof that the Apocalypse was written while the Temple was still standing in Jerusalem![1] Were such writers consistent with themselves, they would make this earlier reference to the Temple of God obscure indeed!

The Temple at Jerusalem had been destroyed twenty-five years before the Apocalypse was given to St. John; and the "Temple of God" is used in the Apocalypse as a symbol of the Christian Church, in its widest sense. Even while the Jewish Temple was still standing, St. Paul used the same expression, with the same figurative meaning, in his prophecy of the Man of Sin.[2]

(5) The *open door* set before the Church of Philadelphia is a symbol of that free access to the presence of God, which is the greatest privilege of the Christian believer.[3] The *open door* set before St. John must be similarly interpreted.[4] He was not (as some have imagined), transported in spirit to some future "day of the Lord"—because a *door was opened in heaven* for his entrance. But he was granted, in the series of visions which he records as the consequence, free access, not only into the presence of God (like other believers), but in some measure even to His secret counsels, and to a knowledge of the hidden future. The *open door* in the message to Philadelphia explains the *open door* in the record of St. John's experience.

[1] Rev. xi. 1, 2. [2] 2 Thess. ii. 4. [3] Rev. iii. 8.
[4] Rev. iv. 1.

Visions of a Time then Future. (Rev. iv.—xxii.)

A change in the manner of the Revelation occurs at the opening of the fourth chapter. Leaving the direct language of the seven Epistles, the prophecy passes at once into a world of complex symbolism. The remainder of the Book is written almost entirely in the language of symbol, and requires the most careful interpretation.

The first verse contains a statement which is sufficient to explain this change of style. What follows has to do with "the things that must be hereafter,"—that is, with *things future to St. John's day.*

It is God's will, in this and in other prophecies, so to reveal the future that "when it is come to pass" men may believe.[1] He reveals it to strengthen faith, not to satisfy curiosity. His people are enabled to recognise fulfilments, but not to predict the events of earthly history. In accordance with this purpose, God reveals the future chiefly under a veil of symbolism, the exact meaning of which can only be understood after the event. The change of style from the direct to the symbolic, in the first verse of this fourth chapter, marks the change of subject from *things then present* to *things then future;* from prophecy in the sense of *preaching*, with Christ as preacher, to prophecy in the sense of *prediction*, with Christ as revealer.

There is no reason for supposing, as some have done, that the change to symbolic language here introduces us to a new and still future state

[1] John xiii. 19; xiv. 29.

of things. The symbolic visions of the Book of Daniel undoubtedly relate to ordinary history. The words translated "hereafter" are so commonplace that they occur twice in this one verse. They mean literally, "after these things,"—that is, after the things which have just been spoken of in relation to seven of the Churches of that day. The "things which must be hereafter" are in fact none other than the "things which must shortly come to pass," referred to in the opening verse of the Book. If the scene is laid in heaven rather than on earth, it is not because the Church is there, but rather because in spirit St. John is there,—and because it is the purpose of the visions to exhibit a heavenly view of the things of earth, rather than an earthly view of the things of heaven. The Christian is privileged to see, if he will only look, the powers of heaven and hell, even in the field of human history; the activity of the enemies of God, but also the "horses and chariots of fire" which ever guard His faithful people.[1]

The case before us is in fact exactly parallel with that of Daniel's visions. In both cases, the vision is of the future, and is therefore veiled in symbolic language. In both cases, the fulfilment begins at once, and extends to a far distant future. In both cases, a divine interpretation of some of the symbols is given, that the rest may be understood. And in both cases, the things that were future to the prophet are now largely matters of past history.

[1] 2 Kings vi. 17.

A Door Opened in Heaven. (Rev. iv. 1.)

The change from things then *present* to things then *future* is associated not only with a change to symbolic writing, but also with *a door opened in heaven*, into which St. John was bidden to enter.

It has been already pointed out how the reference to another *open door*, in the message to the Church of Philadelphia, throws light upon this passage. St. John was to be admitted to a position of privilege granted to no other human being. He was to be allowed to see, in vision and symbol, the *consequences* of the work on earth of Christ his Master; their unfolding and extending till they embrace the whole world, the fierce conflicts which must precede the final victory of the servants of God. He was to receive from Christ Himself, in a symbolic form, the greatest of all prophecies, and to record it for the benefit of Christians in all ages. What he saw and heard in that sacred presence occupies the remainder of the Apocalypse.

A Vision of the God of Revelation.
(Rev. iv. and v.)

The Revelation of things future does not begin at once. A vision of the Revealer precedes the visions of the things revealed. The Prophets of the Old Testament had wonderful glimpses of the majesty of God, but never anything so definite, or so complete, as this vision. God is here pictured in the order of His own self revelation. Men knew Him first as Creator of the world; later on, Israel learned to know Him,

more personally, as Jehovah ; the words of Christ revealed Him as God the Father ; Christ Himself was revealed, at the Resurrection, as God the Son ; and finally, the day of Pentecost revealed the personality of God the Holy Ghost. Each of these revelations was an addition to what went before ; a step of progress in man's knowledge of God.

The stages of that progress appear in this comprehensive vision. The Throne of the Creator, the Jehovah of Israel, is first seen. It is surrounded by the representatives of created nature, and of the saints of the Old Covenant. It is associated with emblems which recall the covenant with Noah, and the terrors of Sinai. Words of praise are heard, but they are only concerned with God's creative power. Then, in the fifth chapter, " the New Testament is added to the Old." The Lamb of God is seen, slain yet alive. The Holy Spirit, described in the fourth chapter as " before the Throne," is now described as " sent forth into all the earth." The song of praise, though it comes from the same lips, has been changed into a new song, a song of redemption by the blood of Christ.

Thus the vision contained in these two chapters is a summary of the gradual self-revelation of God. It is a complete picture of the God who is the God of the Old Testament as well as of the New, and who has revealed Himself to men, not all at once, but " as they were able to bear it." It is a picture, not a history. It looks back, not to Old Testament *times*, but to Old Testament *knowledge*. The Apocalypse looks forward, not backward, into history,—with two exceptions, which occupy only six verses

between them. The vision here given is merely a grand and appropriate setting for a single symbolic action—the giving of a Scroll, close-sealed with seven seals, by Jehovah to the Lamb.

That Scroll can only be the "Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him," referred to in the first words of St. John's record. It was declared to relate to things then future. Its revelation does not in fact begin, until the first of the Seals, which close the symbolic Scroll, is broken, and a part of the contents thus opened to view. With the breaking of the last Seal, the Scroll itself drops out of sight,—for the last hindrance to its unrolling has been removed, and the rest of the Book is fully occupied with the revelation of its contents. It is strange that so many expositors should mistake the meaning of the Seven-Sealed Scroll, and stranger still that any should conclude that its disappearance from the vision at the moment of unrolling indicates that its contents are not revealed at all!

The details of the two chapters remain to be examined.

The fourth chapter has an Old Testament character from beginning to end. There is not a thought in it which would lie outside the view of a saint of the Old Testament. A Throne is seen, the emblem of authority; and there is One sitting upon it,—but He is not described. Here, as in earlier visions of the Throne, the Eternal Father, "whom no man hath seen nor can see," is seen and yet unseen.[1] He is hidden (as it were) in a blaze of glory. A rainbow is seen

[1] Exod. xxiv. 10, 11: Isa. vi. 1-5; i Tim. vi. 15, 16.

over the Throne,—the token of God's earliest covenant with man.[1] Round the Throne are twenty-four lesser thrones—for the same word is used—on each of which a crowned Elder is seated. These Elders would seem to represent God's servants who lived in the days of the Old Testament, before Christ was revealed as their Saviour and ours. They occupy the same kind of position in the vision, as Moses and Elijah occupy in the narrative of the Transfiguration.[2] The Old Testament saints are called "elders" in the Epistle to the Hebrews;[3] but the word has also the widest possible use and meaning. The number, twenty-four, recalls the twenty-four courses of the Levitical priesthood.[4] Like the "Living Creatures" described in this chapter, the Elders form a part of the permanent imagery of the Book. They are onlookers and interpreters rather than participators in the series of visions.

Lightnings, voices, thunders, proceeding from the Throne, suggest the sovereign power of God, and recall the evidences of Jehovah's presence on Mount Sinai.[5] The Holy Spirit appears under the symbolism of seven lamps of fire burning before the Throne. The figure used recalls the solemn ratification of God's covenant with Abraham, when a flaming torch passed (in God's stead) between the parts of the divided victims.[6] It is *the Old Testament view of the Spirit of God*, as dwelling in heaven, and only on special occasions visiting the earth. In front of the Throne there is also a sea of clear glass,

[1] Gen. ix. 13. [2] Matt. xvii. 3. [3] Heb. xi. 2.
[4] 1 Chron. xxiv. 1-19. [5] Exod. xix. 16. [6] Gen. xv. 17.

—the emblem, in days when clear glass was rare and costly, of that which is pure, ethereal, unchangeable.

Around the Throne,—in front, behind, and on either side,—are four Living Creatures. They are symbols representing animated nature in its several orders, and correspond to the Living Creatures, or Cherubim, seen in vision by Ezekiel. Like those beings, they are *full of eyes*, the symbol of intelligence:[1] and full of activity, as representing the restless myriads of living creatures upon earth.[2] Like the Seraphim in the vision of Isaiah, they have six wings;[3] symbolical perhaps, as that vision would seem to suggest, of reverence, humility, and obedience. Their number, four, is the number of creation: their symbolism suggests the various divisions of God's creatures: and the reference to created nature in the last verse of the chapter helps to fix their meaning.

Created nature does in fact occupy the position assigned in vision to these Living Creatures. It stands between man and God both to *hide* and to *reveal*. To hide Him,—for the heathen in their ignorance, as well as some men of science in their wisdom, have failed to "look through nature up to nature's God." To reveal Him,—for the marvellous works of God in nature speak eloquently, at all times, to the willing ear, of the power and wisdom of the Almighty.

There is nothing to be said in favour of the Patristic fancy which makes the Living Creatures represent the four Evangelists, except that the Fathers held it, and that Christian Art has per-

[1] Ezek. x. 12. [2] Ezek. i. 14. [3] Isa. vi. 2.

petuated it. Every indication in the Apocalypse is against it. The interpretation which has been given above has the support of many expositors, including men of widely different views on the subject of interpretation.[1]

The Elders and the Living Creatures are represented as in a constant attitude of praise ; but only such praise as an Old Testament saint could render. And then, with the opening of the fifth chapter, we are introduced to the further and fuller revelation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ, who, in bringing life and immortality to light,[2] has only added these high truths to the previous revelation of the Eternal Father.

The right hand of Jehovah is now seen, and lying upon the open palm (as the Greek indicates) a Scroll, close-sealed with seven seals.

St. John does not say that God's hand was not visible in the earlier part of the vision, but he seems to imply it. It is the only part of Jehovah's form that is described at all. It is as if, out of the glory in which that form was hidden from St. John, the right hand was now seen distinctly for the first time. If that be so, then the change would aptly symbolise the coming of Christ into the world. God's hand had indeed been dimly seen in history before that time, especially in the history of Israel : but it was revealed to mankind, as never before, when God's Son took upon Him man's nature, and lived and died among men.

On the same supposition, the Scroll itself

[1] *e.g.*, Alford, Hengstenburg, Düsterdieck, De Wette, Archdeacon Lee.

[2] 2 Tim. i. 10.

becomes an apt symbol of the secret purposes of God towards the world, through Christ : purposes and possibilities which had been hidden from all previous ages, and were only in that day to be revealed.

In any case, the Sealed Scroll has these things for its subject matter. It has already been identified with the "Revelation of Jesus Christ" of which the first verse of St. John's record speaks. Its contents therefore relate to things future—not necessarily future to us, but future to the time of the vision. They are concerned with the long history of the Church of Christ on earth, from God's point of view : the Second Coming of the Lord to claim the world : and the eternal consequences of His finished work, for His servants and for His enemies.

In a word, the contents of the Sealed Scroll correspond to the visions which fill the remaining chapters of St. John's record. They were not indeed *dictated* to him, and plainly written down : that would have been contrary to God's methods of dealing with mankind during his period of probation. Men are not allowed to know the future events of earth : the knowledge would not be good for them, and might, if such a thing were possible, defeat the purposes of God. And so the contents of the Sealed Scroll, so far as they relate to the present dispensation, are thickly veiled in symbolism : while in all that relates to events beyond the Second Advent, plainer language is used, and the interpreter's task becomes less difficult.

The conclusion is, that the Sealed Scroll is no mere Book of Fate, as some have supposed : nor a Book of hidden things only to be known in

another world, but a Book describing the prophetic history of the Christian Church, as a power entering into human history now, and destined to rule the world with Christ hereafter. Every indication in the chapters which follow helps to confirm this conclusion.

The Scroll is seen in the Father's hand; and an angel puts forth the challenge—who is worthy to open it? Among all the hosts of heaven and earth, none is found worthy,—except the Lamb of God, to whom the privilege is reserved. There was one sufficient reason for "unworthiness" on the part of all others; the comparison with the transcendent claims and personality of Jesus Christ. Beside Him, all created beings, even in heaven itself, were unworthy: the privilege was His by right, and His by victory. By His work on earth He had prevailed to open the Scroll, and to break its Seven Seals.

But the Lamb is not as yet seen in the vision, and the fear that the contents of the Scroll will not be revealed at all, moves St. John to tears. It is not difficult to find the reason. The Apostles, when they began to preach the Gospel, knew nothing of the earthly future of the Church they were founding. As they gathered in converts one by one, they had ever before their minds the expectation of the Lord's speedy return, to crown their humble efforts with His mighty power. We know how strange and unwelcome to them was the new truth of the calling of the Gentiles, and the putting aside, in their case, of the Law of Moses. Then came St. Paul's prophecy of the "Man of Sin," which threw a cloud over the future of the

earthly Church. Years passed, and the Lord did not come. One after another the Apostles passed away, and in every Christian congregation tares were seen to be growing up among the wheat. The Epistles of St. Peter, St. James and St. Jude are written in a minor key in all that relates to the prospects of the Church on earth. It must have been with straining eyes that St. John, left last of all, and himself a lonely exile, looked forward into the earthly future, and wondered what it had in store for the Church of Christ. Here, before him, in vision, was the revelation of things future, for which he longed: a full revelation, for it was written on both sides: and none was found worthy to open it! Is it surprising that he wept?

One of the Elders comforts him; and at once the Lamb of whom he speaks is revealed. His position is central and important, though He is not seen upon the Throne. No mistake can be made as to His identity. The Lamb of God, bearing the marks of sacrifice, slain yet alive, who is also "the Lion of the tribe of Judah,"—can be none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He is represented with seven horns, the symbol of universal power; and seven eyes, which are interpreted for us as "the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth." They are a symbol of the Holy Spirit, now sent forth on Christ's behalf, to carry on His work, as His representative, until His own return. The Lamb as seen is the Lord in glory: the *mystery long hidden* in the bosom of the Father, but now revealed to men and to the hosts of heaven:[1]

[1] Col. i. 26, 27.

the *mystery of godliness*, " manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory." [1]

The Lamb takes the Scroll from the Father's hand ; and at once there is a burst of praise from every being. Living Creatures, Elders, unnumbered angels, every creature in heaven, earth, and sea,—all are represented as joining in that mighty chorus. There is no such burst of praise in any other part of the Apocalypse,—or of the Bible.

Not only so ; the praise of the Elders has been transformed. The old song of creation has become a " new song," a song of redemption. The Elders have realised the truth that they owe their salvation to Christ, whom in their lifetime they could only see afar off, but who is now revealed to them. And as in the earlier part of the vision they were able to take up the praise which was more naturally associated with the Living Creatures, so here the Living Creatures seem to take up the praise which is more naturally that of the Elders alone ; perhaps in view of the Scripture truth, that in some way the whole creation has, or will have, a part in the fruits of redemption. To argue, as some have done, that this " Christian " utterance marks both the Elders and the Living Creatures as *representatives* of Christians, is to miss the close connection between the fourth and fifth chapters of the Book, and between the Living Creatures and the Cherubim of the Old Testament. It must not be forgotten that the two

[1] 1 Tim. iii. 16. R.V.

chapters form a symbolic picture, which is progressive without being actually historical.

The stress laid upon the taking of the Scroll is unmistakable. The action is clearly of great importance in the vision as a whole. Two of our chapters are devoted to giving it a worthy setting. It is the occasion of a unique outburst of praise. It is immediately followed by the breaking of the seals one by one. With this action the strictly symbolic part of the prophecy begins; each stage of progress towards the unrolling of the Scroll being marked by its own vision. From this point onwards the symbolic character is maintained; vision follows vision to the end of the Book, and the series conducts the reader from the going forth of the Gospel to the end of time. The most natural conclusion is, that what follows the breaking of the last Seal is the unfolding, in symbolic form, of the manifold contents of the Sealed Scroll itself.

At this point, the Apocalypse proper begins, and with it the peculiar difficulties of Apocalyptic interpretation. Here too begins, as a help in those difficulties, a special orderliness of treatment, which gives unity to the whole. From this point onwards, the outline adopted will make or mar the interpretation; for the reader finds himself in a world of symbolism, and it is only by paying close attention to every landmark, and every object that is familiar, that he can follow the right path at all.

The most important clue is to be found in the orderly succession of Seals, Trumpets, and Vials. Six Seals are broken, one after the other, each one having its associated Vision; the seventh is found to include seven Trumpets. Six

Trumpets sound, each heralding its own vision ; the seventh is found to include Seven Vials. Six Vials are poured out, each marked by a corresponding vision ; the seventh is found to usher in the Second Advent. The series cannot be broken without fatal effects on interpretation. It is the one guiding line, in the most difficult part of the Book.

Moreover, we know where it begins and ends in history. The first Seal begins, without question, with the day of Pentecost : the last Vial, as has been pointed out, brings in the Second Advent. The clue provided is thus seen to exactly cover the Christian dispensation, or Church-period of history. This conclusion is suggested by a careful study of the structure of the Book itself, without any reference to the contents of the visions which make up the series. But it will appear, in the course of this outline of interpretation, that the contents of the several visions fully bear it out.

Thirteen out of the seventeen chapters of prophecy which the Book contains are thus seen to belong to the present dispensation. They extend from the beginning of the sixth to the sixteenth chapter, with the two following chapters as a kind of explanatory appendix. If heavenly scenes occur in these chapters, they are but search-lights thrown from heaven upon the affairs of earth. If chapters of Wild-beast symbolism are interposed, they are in their right place, explaining what has passed in the vision, or preparing the reader for what is to come. They cannot be treated as isolated predictions without breaking up the Apocalypse into purposeless fragments.

Further, the well-marked division of the series into Seals, Trumpets, and Vials, suggests a threefold division of Christian history. There are reasons for believing that the end of that history is not far off; and, looking back at what is past, a threefold division is manifest. The Church, *considered as a power in the world*—for that is the point of view of the Apocalypse—has actually passed through three well-defined stages. In its connection with history, it has been successively *militant*, *dominant*, *decadent*. It was fighting for political existence for nearly three centuries; it was dominant in the Roman world—the "world" of the Apocalypse—for nearly thirteen centuries; it has been decadent, as a ruling factor in "Christendom" for some three centuries past. There are marked crises which separate the three conditions; but only as crises, for great historical movements are nearly always gradual in their real character. The existence of these three conditions is clear enough on the face of history; and to each of them is allotted, as will presently be seen, one of the three successive groups of symbols,—Seals, Trumpets, Vials.

"The Church," in this connection, must needs be given its widest sense, as equivalent to *organised Christianity*. It is the influence of organised Christianity on the affairs of Christendom that has grown, and triumphed, and decayed. The Christian religion is as much "the power of God unto salvation" now, as it ever was in past days. But the influence of Christianity as a ruling factor in the world's politics has fallen away very greatly during recent centuries, and is falling away still. It is the office of the Apocalypse to reveal, not so much the great spiritual

truths about the Church, already revealed in St. Paul's Epistles, as *the history of the earthly Church in its progress and its apostasy, and the influence of that history on the true servants of Jesus Christ.*[1]

The First Four Seals. (Rev. vi. 1-8.)

In the sixth chapter, the opening of the Seven-sealed Book begins: that is, the unfolding, in symbolic form, of the *Revelation of Jesus Christ* from which our Book of the Revelation takes its name.

The Book—or Scroll, for that was certainly the form of it—is represented as close-sealed with seven seals, as if to indicate the *secrecy* and the *importance* of its contents. Each of the seven seals must be broken, before the Scroll can be unrolled. But the breaking of each seal is a step nearer to the actual unrolling; and this thought of *progress towards opening* is all that is needed, in order to explain why a special symbolic picture is associated with the breaking of each separate seal. The seal-visions exhibit the successive stages in the emergence of the Gospel in history; or, in other words, the steps which led up to the emancipation of the Christian Church. What may be called the Seal-Period extends from the small beginnings at Jerusalem to the defeat and degradation of the gods of Pagan Rome. This will appear in the detailed interpretation which follows.

The first four Seal-visions are so exactly alike in their form, that they must be kept together

[1] See Note K.

in interpretation. Each is introduced by one of the four Living Creatures, with the cry, "Come."[1] The central figure of each is a symbolic horseman. Whatever principle of interpretation applies to one, must apply to the other three.

There are several clear indications to guide the expositor. The herald cry is simply, as in the twenty-second chapter, *the Gospel invitation*.[2] It has indeed been suggested that in *that* verse the Second Advent is intended, but such a view is seen to be impossible, if the whole verse is taken into account. Here, as there, the Gospel message is intended: nor could there be a better starting-point for a Revelation relating to the Christian ages.

Again, a horse is in the Bible the constant symbol of war.[3] The use of the horse for other purposes than war was almost unknown in Eastern countries: other animals were used as beasts of burden. No figure could be more appropriate in connection with the Gospel and its messengers. It went forth from Jerusalem to conquer the Roman Empire with spiritual weapons. Its messengers, though as sheep among wolves, were to face a hostile world, and to subdue it to Christ. It is the *progress of the Gospel-warfare* against the Pagan world, that is the subject of the Seal-visions; more particularly of the first four.

If these two points are remembered, the interpretation of the sixth chapter presents little real difficulty.

[1] R.V.

[2] Rev. xxii. 17.

[3] *e.g.*, Job xxxix. 19-24; Ps. xx. 7; Prov. xxi. 31; Jer. vi. 23.

The First Seal. (Rev. vi. 1, 2.)

The first Seal exhibits a white horse, whose rider goes forth *conquering and to conquer.* White is the colour of victory as well as of purity. The words "conquering and to conquer," suggesting as they do an endless conquest, are appropriate to no earthly power—not even to all-conquering Rome. A bow in the rider's hand is a further indication that the Roman Empire—then at the height of its power—is not here intended. The bow was never a Roman weapon: it was left to the allies of Rome to furnish archers. The warfare of the first four Seals is spiritual warfare: and the first Seal represents *the Gospel, going forth in purity and power*, conquering and to conquer: winning victories in those early days to which the Seals especially refer, but destined to be victorious even to the end. The rider is not Christ: he has none of the marks which identify the Rider in the nineteenth chapter. The riders seen in the three Seal-visions that follow are *personifications*: and the rider in this first vision is best taken as a personification of the Gospel. But the victory of the Gospel is the victory of Christ: and the imagery of the first Seal recalls the words of the forty-fifth Psalm.[1]

The crown, as the Greek word indicates, is a crown of victory rather than of royalty, and fits in with the other details of the vision.[2]

The connection of the first Seal with the first, or *lion-like* Living Creature, may be intended to suggest the courage and strength needed for

[1] Ps. xlv. 3-5. [2] Note N.

the great venture of faith which, in those earliest days especially, was required of apostles and believers.

The opening of the first Seal is heralded by a voice which, unlike the other three voices, is described as *like thunder*—that is, heavenly, loud, and penetrating. Perhaps an allusion is intended to the miracle of Pentecost: the noise *as of a rushing mighty wind*, filling the house, and the many-tongued message, new and powerful, filling the city of Jerusalem. For the miracle of Pentecost was the starting-point of the Seal-Period.[1]

The Second Seal. (Rev. vi. 3, 4.)

The second Seal exhibits a red horse, whose rider is allowed to take peace from the earth; bearing, as his emblem, a great sword. Here all speaks of bitter strife: the colour of the horse, the great sword, the rider's errand. To the thought of Gospel-warfare, in the general sense in which it enters into each of these four seal-visions, is here added the thought of a literal strife and division, often involving the use of carnal weapons; the fulfilment of the Lord's own warning: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."[2] The Gospel message was soon found, wherever it came, to be a cause of discord—because, like a touchstone, it separated true from false, worthy from unworthy. The Apostles came to be described as men who "turned the world upside down."[3]

Thus the second Seal represents *the Gospel*,

[1] Acts ii. 1, 2. [2] Matt. x. 34. [3] Acts xvii. 6.

found to be not peace, but a sword: a cause of bitter strife between believers and unbelievers. The rider would seem to be a personification of *strife* or discord. The whole is an emblem of the second stage in the Gospel-warfare.

The connection of the second Seal with the second Living Creature, described as like a calf (or, as it might fairly be translated, ox), may be intended to suggest the patient endurance needed, after the first venture of faith had been made, in face of the constant hostility of friends and brethren. The Lord had said it would be so, and it is not necessary to go outside the pages of the New Testament to find sufficient illustration.

The Third Seal. (Rev. vi. 5, 6.)

The third Seal exhibits a black horse, whose rider holds a balance in his hand. At the same time, words are heard from among the four Living Creatures: "A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and the oil and the wine hurt thou not."

This Seal has given great trouble to expositors. They have nearly all taken the black colour of the horse as indicating *famine;* and find the same meaning in the emblem of the *balance*, supposing it to be here connected with the price of food. There is, however, no sufficient reason for finding in the black colour here any other sense than that usually attached to it —the sense of *mourning*. Both among Jews and Romans, dark clothing was almost exclusively reserved for mourners. The sackcloth, which so often appears in Scripture as an emblem of mourning, was nearly black. Again, the balance

is far more commonly an emblem of *justice* and the law, than of scarcity. The grain is here expressly spoken of as *measured*, and not weighed. Enough is known of the prices and wages of those days, to prove that the prices named were not famine-prices: in fact, a recent scholarly expositor gives the true sense of the words when he paraphrases them thus: "a day's ration of wheat for a day's pay, and three rations of barley for a day's pay." The luxuries, oil and wine, are described as being as plentiful as usual. It is strange that expositors should be so misled by the mention of famines in the prophecy on the Mount of Olives, as to overlook, or explain away, the obvious objections to finding such a meaning here.

If, in accordance with the natural indications of the symbolism, the balance is taken to be an emblem of *law* and *justice*, and the black colour, an emblem of *mourning*—that is, in this connection, of condemnation rather than acquittal—the details of the vision are found to harmonise. The added words are then easily accounted for. They are intended to prevent mistake, by saying, in effect—"the vision of the rider has nothing to do with the fruits of the earth: they are not withheld; the balance bears its other meaning—the sense of justice."

The balance stands here for law: but the symbol as a whole would seem to be more definite still, and to stand for *Roman* law. On the coins of some of the Roman Emperors a figure appears, holding in one hand a balance, as the symbol of Roman justice, and in the other a cornucopia, as the symbol of the fruits of the earth in their abundance. These coins bear the

legend, AEQUITAS AUGUSTI, "the equity or justice of Augustus."[1] This combination of ideas is exactly that of the third Seal. There is the symbolic figure, the balance, and words which indicate that the fruits of the earth are not wanting. If the balance points to justice, the combined symbol surely stands for Roman justice—Aequitas Augusti.

Thus the third Seal represents *the Gospel, dragged before Roman judgment-seats*, in the persons of its adherents, nearly always for condemnation.[2] It sets before us the attempt, often illustrated even in the early days dealt with in the Acts of the Apostles, to brand Christian believers as disturbers of the peace.[3] It marks a third stage in the progress of the Gospel-warfare against Paganism. The words in the sixth verse, relating to the price of food, are explanatory, indicating the right meaning of the *balance*, and helping to bind the whole figure to Pagan Rome.

The connection of the third Seal with the third, or man-like, Living Creature, may be intended to suggest the wisdom needed in those brought before the magistrates, to enable them to speak faithfully, and yet say nothing which might give a handle to the enemy. Such wisdom was especially promised by Christ to His disciples.[4]

[1] One such coin is figured in Elliott's *Horæ Apoc.* i., 185.

[2] Matt. x. 17, 18.

[3] *e.g.* Acts xvi. 20, 21; xviii. 12, 13.

[4] Luke xii. 11, 12.

The Fourth Seal. (Rev. vi. 7, 8.)

The fourth Seal introduces a pale horse, whose rider's name is Death, followed by another symbolic figure representing Hades, the place of the dead. To the rider is given authority, extending over the *fourth* of the earth, to kill with sword, with famine, with *death*, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

This Seal, as a whole, is not difficult to interpret; but in some of its details it has been misunderstood by many. Starting as before from the thought of Gospel-warfare, the figures speak of wide-spread persecution even to the death. The pale or livid colour is that of a dead body. The forms of death indicated are beheading, starvation, pestilence (that is, death in foul prisons), and the wild beasts in the amphitheatre. Each of these forms of death is illustrated in the scanty records left to us of those who suffered under Pagan Rome.[1]

This is all the more remarkable, because two out of the four forms of death—starvation and the wild beasts—can scarcely be illustrated from any other period, or any other persecution by a civilised state; nor are they again mentioned in the Apocalypse, in connection with other persecutions. The reference here is thus bound up with Pagan Rome—more clearly than in the case of the third Seal—and the whole interpretation is indirectly confirmed.

[1] *e.g.*—In the letter of Lucian to Celerinus, preserved among Cyprian's letters, the writer refers, quite incidentally, to martyrs who have died from the effects of torture, prison, and starvation; he himself being under sentence of death by hunger and thirst. The date of the letter is A.D. 250.

One point remains. The authority under this Seal is over *the fourth* of the earth. The word *part*, which is not in the Greek, might be supplied if the sentence were not in the midst of symbolic prophecy. But the word used for *fourth* applies to *order* as well as to *division* into parts; and the quite peculiar use, many times, of *the third*, in connection with the Trumpets, supports the explanation, that *the fourth of the earth* is a cryptic way of referring to the fourth kingdom of Daniel's visions,—the power that rules from Rome; while *the third* means the power that rules from Greece. All the passages containing the two expressions are satisfactorily explained in this way. The authority here given over *the fourth* of the earth, implies persecutions over the whole of the Roman Empire.[1]

Thus the fourth Seal represents *the Gospel, placed under the ban of Roman law*, throughout the Roman world. All other methods of opposition had failed; Christianity still continued to spread. It was not enough to bring Christians before the magistrates as disturbers of the peace, —as in the third Seal. That had been tried, and had failed. The very profession of Christianity must be made a crime, and punished with death. This was the fourth stage of progress in the Gospel-warfare; and it was historically the last stage of Pagan opposition to the Christian faith.

The connection of the fourth Seal with the fourth Living Creature, described as like a flying eagle, may well be intended to suggest the soaring faith which could so fix the mind on the things

[1] See Note I.

of heaven that it could despise the pains of earth ; which could enable the weakest to face the prison or the wild beasts, rather than deny their Christianity by the sprinkling of a few grains of incense before the shrine of some Pagan deity.

To sum up,—the first four Seals have been taken as representing four stages in the progress of the Gospel-warfare which began from the day of Pentecost :—

Seal 1.—The Gospel, going forth in purity and power.

Seal 2.—The Gospel, found to be, not peace, but a sword.

Seal 3.—The Gospel, dragged before Roman judgment-seats.

Seal 4.—The Gospel, proscribed throughout the Roman world.

By so understanding them, it has been possible to fulfil three important conditions : (1) to interpret in a natural manner every detail ; (2) to find interpretations of precisely the same nature for all the four : and (3) to refer the visions, not to secular history, but to the progress of the Christian religion. Nothing has been omitted, consistency has been attained, and the religious purpose of the Apocalypse has been remembered. And if no expositor explains all the details in exactly the way indicated, there are many writers who make the first four Seals cover exactly the same period of history, and whose interpretation of the fifth and sixth Seals agrees entirely with that which is adopted in the pages that follow.

There are symbolised, in these four Seals, not four events, nor four periods, but four stages in the gradual emergence of the Gospel in history.

In each city to which the Gospel came, the circumstances were different, — the number of converts, the violence of the opposition, the lapse of time,—but everywhere the treatment experienced from the heathen followed the same general lines. There was first a friendly welcome, with some conversions; then a growing hostility, as the great claim of Christ was realised; then a prosecution of the new teachers, as promoters of disorder; and finally severe, and legalised, persecution—man's last resort against the power of truth. These are the four stages plainly marked out in the first four Seals. The first three are found illustrated in the Acts of the Apostles. The fourth received a local illustration under the Emperor Nero; but there was no "general persecution" until A.D. 250, in the reign of the Emperor Decius.

The interpretation given does not make any of these four Seals *past* in the time of St. John. Three of them had already been illustrated in the progress of the Gospel; but they continued to mark that progress during the whole of the next two centuries. So long as the Gospel was face to face with a dominant Paganism, they repeated themselves whenever and wherever the Gospel showed its power. The last of them reached its climax under Diocletian, just before the final victory, which laid Paganism in the dust. The victory was not won until a great company of Christian martyrs had laid down their lives for Christ.

The Fifth Seal. (Rev. vi. 9-11.)

These early martyrs—the martyrs of the first three centuries—are the subject of the vision

that follows. The picture of slaughter, under the fourth Seal—of death by the sword, by starvation, by foul prisons, by wild beasts in the arena—is followed by the heavenly aspect of the same transaction, under the fifth Seal. The souls of those slain for the name of Christ are seen in vision, at the foot of the heavenly altar. They are crying with a loud voice for vengeance on their murderers: "How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" To accuse these souls of vindictiveness, and say that they cannot be Christians, is to mistake a symbolic picture for an actual event. It is *souls* that are seen—not glorified saints, but the *lives* laid down for Christ: and they are seen at the foot of the altar of sacrifice, the place where the blood (which represented the life) of the victim was poured away. As the "voice" of Abel's blood cried to God from the ground for vengeance upon Cain,[1] so does the blood of the martyrs here cry "with a loud voice" (loud because there are many of them) for the vengeance of the Master whom they have died to serve.[2]

A two-fold answer is here given to that cry of martyr-blood. In relation to the martyrs themselves, it is given under the fifth Seal, and is not unlike the answer given to St. Paul's importunate prayer for relief from special suffering: "My grace is sufficient for thee."[3] The white

[1] Gen. iv. 10.

[2] It should be remembered that God's *vengeance* is rather *vindication*, especially in such a passage as this.

[3] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

robes of Christ's righteousness are theirs: for their vindication they must wait God's time. They are told that there will be another great company of martyrs to be avenged—the martyrs under Papal Rome—their fellow-servants and their brethren. The end is not yet.

But in relation to suffering brethren still on earth, an answer is given under the sixth Seal, not in the form of vengeance, but of victory. It is an answer glorious and complete, as a deliverance from Paganism; but, like the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage, it is the beginning, rather than the end, of a long and chequered earthly history.

The fifth Seal occupies, in fact, in relation to the deliverance from Paganism, exactly the same position as the Vision of the Burning Bush occupies in relation to the deliverance from Egypt.[1] In both cases a long period of increasing oppression leads up to the occasion of the Vision. In both cases the burden of the Vision is God's message: "I have heard their cry, and am come down to deliver them." In both cases there follows a great, though only an earthly, deliverance: setting free God's people to the privileges and responsibilities of a new and independent existence.

Thus the fifth Seal carries the progress of the Gospel-war a step further, showing by means of a symbolic picture that God has remembered His suffering people, and that the longed-for emancipation is at hand.

[1] Exod. iii. 1-10.

The Sixth Seal. (Rev. vi. 12-17.)

The language of the sixth Seal is highly figurative, like the language of the Seals that have preceded it. It is at the same time more elaborate than any of them.

The figures used include a shaking of earth and heaven, a darkening and removal of the heavenly bodies, a rolling-up of the heaven itself like a scroll that is done with; and, following this, a cry of panic from all those who have opposed the faith of the Lamb of God. Evidently some signal triumph of the Gospel upon earth is intended by the Seal as a whole. Nothing can be here intended which in a literal sense disturbs the course of nature. The removal of sun, moon and stars, of mountains and islands, of heaven itself, is in this passage so far figurative, that it leaves man still able to cry out in fear on earth: and earth itself, with sea and trees unharmed, is the subject of the next few verses, which lead without a break (for St. John did not write in chapters) towards the opening of the seventh and last Seal.

The line of correct interpretation is indicated clearly enough, in several ways, even before the details of the symbolism are examined. (1) The cry of panic from the enemies of the Lamb, in this Seal, should be connected in some way with the cry for vengeance on the persecutors, in the preceding Seal. (2) The rolling-up of the heaven like a scroll that is done with is a reminder that another symbolic scroll is almost ready for unrolling, and will be unrolled directly the next Seal is broken. It is natural to suppose

that what is symbolised by the one is about to take the place of what is symbolised by the other. For the heaven here spoken of cannot be taken literally without making absolute nonsense of the passage. (3) As the first five Seals have been shown to represent stages in the progress of the Gospel-war with Paganism, it follows that the sixth Seal, if it represents a deliverance at all, should naturally represent a deliverance from the Pagan power.

Each of these separate indications leads to the same conclusion : that the sixth Seal is a highly figurative description of the overthrow of Paganism, and its replacement by Christianity. The extreme importance of this event has been recognised by historians ; not least by Gibbon, who in spite of his strong bias against Christianity, considers that the "ruin of the Pagan religion" is without a parallel in history.[1] What the Christians of that day thought of it, is fully described in the contemporary writings of Eusebius, and is suggestive of the rejoicing in Rev. xii. 10, which refers to the same victory. But it was a birth-day rather than the attainment of a goal. It marked the beginning of the Church's independent existence. It was a birth to a new life, after 280 years of comparative obscurity and dependence.[2] A curious analogy has been pointed out, on the prophetic principle of a year for a day, between the periods of this and of a human birth. The very close analogy between this deliverance and the deliverance from Egyp-

[1] *Decline and Fall*, chap. xxviii.

[2] Reckoning from A.D. 32 (the Gospel preached to Gentiles) to A.D. 312 (Constantine's decree in favour of Christianity).

tian bondage has already been pointed out: and the history of the desert-wanderings of faithless Israel is only too true a type of the history of the Christian Church, in the centuries that have followed its emancipation.

The symbolism used in the vision is entirely appropriate to the above interpretation, which has been widely held by historical interpreters. It is necessary, however, to give special attention to the symbols employed, for they have been made by some expositors to refer to the events connected with the Second Advent: a view which is in itself untenable, and one which, if adopted, results in the dislocation of the Apocalypse. It is, as it were, the taking of a wrong turning at the very outset of a journey.

The symbolism divides itself into two parts; (*a*) the convulsions of nature; and (*b*) the cry of panic-stricken enemies, which follows.

The heaven or firmament was supposed by the ancients to support in some way the heavenly bodies, forming a sort of transparent arch or canopy on which, or in which, they moved. Behind it, or above it, was the throne of God, and His dwelling place. It became, therefore, naturally considered as the place of authority: and the sun and moon as in some sense deputed by God to rule over the day and night. The language of the first chapter of Genesis is based upon these ideas of heaven and the heavenly bodies.[1] The language of the sixth Seal (as of some other passages)[2] applies the same ideas figuratively.

[1] Gen. i. 16.

[2] Gen. xxxvii. 9, 10: Joel ii. 10, 31.

Thus the sun, moon, and stars, stand for the various degrees of authority among men. The divine explanation of the Seven Stars in the first chapter of the Apocalypse is one among many passages which support this interpretation. The heaven itself becomes a natural figure of what we call the *régime* at any particular period: the whole governmental and social system in its widest sense. The eclipse of sun and moon—which are accurately described in this vision, for the sun when eclipsed appears *black*, the moon *a dull red*, from the earth's reflected light—represents the fall of the central powers, the great rulers. The falling of the stars, as shooting stars fall, indicates loss of position and influence by the lesser members of the ruling caste. The taking away of the firmament itself is a figure of a radical change in the whole system: a revolution social and religious as well as political. And all these things unquestionably took place when the government of the Roman Empire, following the lead of Constantine, put aside the Pagan beliefs that had entered into every relation of life for a thousand years.[1]

The word translated earthquake means simply *shaking*,[2] and would here seem to be a shaking of the heaven rather than of the earth, if we may judge from the results described. But the mountains and islands are afterwards said to be

[1] It is worthy of notice, that Eusebius, when describing the conversion of the *ruling powers* to Christianity, as the sequel to Constantine's victory, uses the figures of the sixth Seal: calling them "the celestial powers, the sun, the moon, and the stars, the whole heavens and the world."—*Eccl. Hist.*, Bk. x., chap. iv.

[2] As in Matt. viii. 24, where it is used of a *storm*.

moved out of their places. A mountain is sometimes used for a state or kingdom:[1] islands are referred to as the most distant parts of the earth;[2] so that the wide-spread effect of the "shaking" may perhaps be indicated. But an allusion to the faith which could, in the words of the proverb which our Lord applied, *remove mountains*, that is, effect things apparently impossible, cannot be excluded.[3] Nothing could have seemed at one time more impossible than the complete overthrow of the Pagan system by Christianity: but the prayer and faith and patience of Christians effected that result.

Another side of the picture occupies the last three verses. The men of earth, great and small,—evidently only those who have opposed the Christian faith,—cry out in fear. They have heard of, and scorned the thought of a day of judgment: now it seems to have come upon them. They have cruelly treated the unresisting followers of the Lamb: now they find themselves at the mercy of those whom they have persecuted. The words are the natural words of fear: they are not statements of fact made by the revealing angel. The purpose of their being recorded is plain enough. By such an utterance, the defeated persecutors bear unwilling testimony, that the cry of their victims' blood, in the preceding Seal, is in part answered; that God's power has been felt among them; that His fear has fallen upon the Pagan world, as it fell upon the inhabitants of Canaan.[4] And it is worthy of notice (for many expositors have overlooked

[1] Jer. li. 25: Dan. ii. 35.
[2] Isa. xi. 11.
[3] Matt. xvii. 20: 1 Cor. xiii. 2.
[4] Josh. ii. 9-11: v. 1.

the fact), that even if Scripture usage allowed the *removal of the heaven*, or any of the other figures used in verses 12 to 14, to be literally understood, the contents of the last three verses would alone make such a view impossible. How can the men of earth cry out in fear, and hide in dens and caves, after heaven itself has been removed, after sun, moon, and stars have ceased to shine, and after the mountains and islands have departed?

Moreover, there is here no violent break, no new beginning. The seventh Seal shows that in spite of the events of the sixth Seal, earth continues as before: the day of the Lord has *not* come. And as if to show that the great religious revolution by which Paganism was replaced by Christianity, is worthy of the striking figures here used to represent it, a further allusion is made to it, from another point of view, in the account of the *war in heaven* which occurs in the twelfth chapter.[1]

Thus the sixth Seal is a symbolic picture of *the triumph of Christianity over Paganism*, the emancipation of the Christian Church from oppression, the emergence of the Gospel as a recognised factor in history. If only the expositor will allow himself to be guided, not by the interpretation of some other passage which he assumes to be a key to this one,[2] but by the passage itself: if he will follow the lines suggested by the use which is made in other parts of Scripture, of the various symbols here employed: if he takes into account the nature of the Seals that precede and follow this one;—he

[1] Rev. xii. 7-12. [2] See Note C.

can scarcely mistake the interpretation. The continued spread of Christianity, in spite of all that was done to suppress it; the constancy and the number of the Christian martyrs; the misfortunes that befel each persecuting Emperor in turn; and finally, the marked success of the first armies that placed the cross upon their banner; —all combined to bring about the greatest religious revolution the world has seen. The supremacy of the Pagan system on which the Roman Empire, and *all previous Empires*, had been built up, gave place, within a few years, to the supremacy of Christianity. God's hand was as truly at work as when He sent the plagues on Egypt for the deliverance of Israel. No sooner had one Emperor espoused the Christian cause, than the whole system of Paganism began to collapse. With astonishing rapidity, and without the need of any violent measures, the leading adherents fell away, its temples became neglected. There were still Pagans everywhere: a people's religion does not change in a generation. It needed the ravages of the Northern invaders, a century later, to make a full end of shrines and temples. But the decay of the religion itself had gone so far in forty years, that even the vigorous efforts of the Pagan Emperor Julian could not restore light to its darkened heavens. The Pagan religion itself was before long to be, in the Roman Empire, a thing of the past. The long scroll of Pagan history was rolled up and put away, just at the moment when the seven-sealed scroll of Christian history was ready to be unrolled, and to take its place.

A Parenthesis, including two Scenes. (Rev. vii.)

The crisis is over, the victory assured; and for a time the vision becomes more deliberate. There is general agreement, that the two symbolic pictures which occupy the seventh chapter are merely a parenthesis, or bracketed portion, interrupting for a moment the progress of the Seal visions, which are continued, without any mark of a new beginning, in the eighth chapter. The seventh chapter might with advantage be placed in a bracket, and the chapter-divisions on either side of it obliterated: for chapter-divisions have no authority, and they are here misleading. It would then be seen, more clearly than at present, that the sixth Seal is not an end. It merely leads to the seventh Seal, which in turn introduces the seven Trumpets: and these, together with the sealing of Israel which is but a preparation for them, show by their nature that the sixth Seal has left the conditions of earthly life untouched. Earthly history goes on as before, with its troubles, wars, and dangers. The vision has not yet reached the times of the Second Advent.

The two visions of the seventh chapter illustrate God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises to His people. A mark of protection for some who will presently be in danger; an evidence of a glorious reward for others who have died to win the victory just described;—these are the subjects dealt with. The seal of protection, as is shown by the allusion to it under the fifth Trumpet, looks *forward* to the Trumpet-period, which begins in the eighth chapter. The heavenly reward looks *backward* to the warfare

of the Seal-period, described in the sixth chapter. The two visions are therefore seen to be introduced just where we should expect to find them.

Their inverted order has already been noticed, and its purpose—to form a link connecting the seventh Seal with the sixth; to show that what is predicted under the seventh Seal *follows* what is predicted under the sixth; to show that the events described in the sixth Seal lead, without a break, to the period of the Trumpets which form the "contents" of the seventh Seal; to prove that the sixth Seal *cannot refer to the end of this dispensation.* The vision that looks *forward* is put first: that which looks *backward*, second. It is impossible for the interpreter to stop at the end of the sixth Seal (adding the vision of reward), and say, "At this point there is recapitulation: the vision goes back and begins again." By the inverted order of the two visions of the seventh chapter, it is proved to demonstration that the events of the Trumpet-period follow in order of time those of the sixth Seal.

The Sealing of Israel. (Rev. vii. 1-8.)

St. John is first shown the sealing of "the servants of God." Four angels are seen holding back the four winds from hurting the earth. Another angel, with "a seal of the living God," cries out to them not to let loose the winds until he has sealed the servants of God, as a protection in the times of danger which those "winds" will bring with them. A list of the sealed follows. They are all Israelites: twelve thousand of each

tribe. They are not further described in this passage; but in the course of the fifth Trumpet they alone are uninjured by the swarms of figurative locusts.[1] Evidently the sealing is to be a protection during the Trumpet period. After that period is over they are seen once more: their danger is past. They are described on that occasion as marked by a high morality —pure, truthful, honest, perhaps also, free from idolatry.[2]

Who are these Sealed ones? Hebrews, surely, for they are called "Sons of Israel," and the twelve tribes are actually named in order. Moreover, there is no hint or mark of Christian *faith* in either passage, though they are indeed said, in the fourteenth chapter, to "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." That may mean no more than following out the Mosaic Law, as He did, in spirit as well as in the letter. "If thou wilt enter into life," said our Lord to a Jew, "keep the commandments." The Law had never at any time more than a sacramental efficacy— an efficacy derived wholly from the work of the Christ who was to come. It availed, in that sense, to save a David and a Samuel: why should it not be accepted by God, even during the Christian ages, in the case of those right-minded Jews, who, while not rightly apprehending Christ, have often set an example to Christians of these very virtues named— purity, truthfulness, honesty, and freedom from idolatry?

Be this as it may, it is a matter that belongs to the fourteenth chapter rather than to the

[1] Rev. ix. 4. [2] Rev. xiv. 1-5.

seventh—those who are here sealed can only be Israelites, sealed for earthly preservation. They cannot be converted Israelites, for conversion makes a Jew a partaker of a "better covenant,"[1] under which there are no distinctions of Jew or Gentile : all are one in Christ Jesus. But Israelites who reject Christ, and hold fast by their Law, are still under covenant with God—an *earthly* covenant. God's promises to Abraham's seed were unconditional ; unless, perhaps, the observance of circumcision and of the Sabbath may be considered as conditions ; and these are fulfilled by Jews to this day. God does not break His promises.[2] The preservation of Israel, which is acknowledged to be a miracle of history, is an outward evidence of the faithfulness of God shown towards a disobedient people.

What could be more natural than that Israel, scattered, without a centre of worship or of unity, and threatened by the hostility of Christians in a bigoted age, should be seen in vision, just before the troubled times begin, sealed by God for preservation as a race? The number sealed is small : the whole nation is not sealed from injury. History records that millions of Jews have perished miserably. What is intended is the preservation of a stock, from century to century, that God's promise to Abraham may not fail. The number mentioned has Israel's mark upon it—the number *twelve*.[3] Twelve tribes are named, as standing for "all Israel" : the addition of the name of Dan would have marred the symbolism. The God who thus seals men for the preservation of earthly

[1] Heb. viii. 6. [2] Rom. xi. 29. [3] Note H.

life is (here alone in the Apocalypse) "the Living God." And the earthly starting-point of the angel, who, alone among Apocalyptic angels, *ascends*—and ascends *from the East;* the earthly troubles from which, or in which, preservation is given; the earthly tribes, so fully named—all point to the same conclusion, that the life meant is *earthly* life, and the sealed people an *earthly* people.

These are the conclusions to which the passage leads us. It is impossible, in a brief outline of interpretation, to show how remarkably history supports them: how the danger to Israel began exactly at the period indicated by the seventh Seal—how, while all others suffered in the terrible days of the Barbarian invasions, those invasions actually benefited the Jews[1]—how the hordes of Saracens brought misery to all besides, but prosperity to them—and how, when the Reformation began, and the national danger was over, the Jews were found setting an example to a corrupted Christendom of moral purity, honesty, and hatred of idolatry.

The Reward of the Martyrs. (Rev. vii. 9-17.)

The second scene is in marked contrast to the first in every particular. In place of a select and numbered few there is an innumerable host. In place of Israelites there are people from every nation. In place of mere earthly protection,

[1] "In recording this extraordinary career of conquest [by the Saracens], our concern, of course, is how it affected the Jews; and everywhere it will be found that—as in the instance of the incursion of the Northern nations—what was ruin and misery to others failed to injure, nay, benefited them."—H. C. Adams, *History of the Jews*, p. 96; see also p. 80.

there is heavenly glory, with Christ, before the throne of God. Yet some writers refer the two visions to the same persons, as seen under different conditions!

The first vision plainly states that it is concerned with Israel; the second, as plainly, that it is concerned with Christian martyrs and confessors. They have been faithful to Christ in days of special trial, and are now seen enjoying their reward. There is no note of time: the vision is a symbolic picture, general in character, showing that martyrs and confessors are not forgotten before God. From the point of view of human time, it is an anticipation, for Scripture nowhere suggests that the souls of the righteous enter into glory before the day of the resurrection. Rest is their portion now, glory their prospect hereafter. In this passage a searchlight is thrown, as it were, from a heaven which knows no past or future, to brighten the dark days of martyrs upon earth. But, from the position which it occupies between the sixth and seventh Seals, it may be taken as referring more particularly to those who suffered in the struggle against Roman Paganism.

The multitude in the vision is said to consist of those who have come out of "the great tribulation," an expression which many writers apply to a great persecution supposed to be still future. There may be such a persecution at the last, but it is not to be found in this passage. "The great tribulation" is an expression used here, not for any particular persecution, but for the sum total of all the untold sufferings and trials of the countless martyrs and confessors of the Christian ages to

the very end. Of that sum total no small part undoubtedly belongs to the martyrs of the first three centuries.

The passage closes with a beautiful promise, recalling the pastoral figures of the twenty-third Psalm.

The Seventh Seal. (Rev. viii. 1-5.)

The parenthesis describing God's secret purposes is finished, and the series of historical visions is now resumed. The seventh and last Seal is broken; the Scroll is thus unloosed; but the only immediate result is "silence in heaven" for about half-an-hour.

To suppose that this silence constitutes by itself the seventh Seal-vision, is impossible; for the long series which has preceded could scarcely lead up to nothing but a silence. To argue from it that the Sealed Scroll, though opened, is not revealed, is equally impossible; for the whole meaning and purpose of the four preceding chapters would be thereby lost. It is, of course, a silence in *the heaven of St. John's vision*, from which so many voices had been heard, of command, or praise, or explanation. It has a very definite meaning. It represents a period of rest for the Church from external enemies,—a period of about 70 years, which came to an abrupt end at the death of the great Emperor Theodosius in A.D. 395.

The newly-emancipated Church had great need of rest. During those 70 years, it was able to "set its house in order." They were years of synods and councils, of violent controversy not free from bloodshed,—but they led to peace.

The fierce Arian controversy, which touched the essentials of the faith, and divided Christians into two rival camps, raged during all those years, until Theodosius restored to its rightful place the truth for which Athanasius and Ambrose had fought so well. The great doctrines of Christianity were at last so carefully defined that they could no longer be mistaken. During those years also, Paganism and Judaism made a last effort to regain their old position, and failed. The attempt made by the Emperor Julian to restore them to influence, was an attempt to quietly supersede, rather than to destroy by force, the Christian religion. It lasted just long enough to show how hopeless, already, was the cause of the Pagan gods, which had so recently been supreme. The close of the period found the Church strong, settled, united,—and so (under God) able to survive as a church the fearful flood of Barbarian conquest, which in the next century swept away every other organization that had belonged to the old Empire.

The contents of the seventh Seal include the silence in heaven ; but also the silent actions of an angel with a golden censer, which lead to many voices and much disturbance, upon earth. *Before these actions are described*, the seven Trumpet-angels are seen, and trumpets are given to them. The seven Trumpets are thus definitely linked on to the last of the seven Seals. The Seal-period, during which Christianity was fighting for its place in the world, was followed by the Trumpet-period, during which it was first secure, and then supreme.

The Censer-vision, as has been said, belongs to the period of silence in heaven. No word is

spoken, no sound is heard, in heaven, until the first trumpet is sounded, in the seventh verse. Before that takes place, and apart from the silent preparation of the Trumpet-angels, an angel is seen standing at the heavenly altar. He is silently offering before God the worship that ascends from the Church on earth, mingling with it the acceptable incense of heaven.[1] Then a change occurs in his actions. He takes fire from the altar, and casts it down upon the earth ; and there are heard on earth voices and thunders, followed by an earthquake.

This short vision represents in symbolic form the worship of the Church on earth, and the interruption of that worship by the holy zeal of controversy. The men of that day were earnest men, contending for the truths which they held dear,—for the very objects of their worship. It was indeed a fiery zeal, inspired from heaven, that made Athanasius strong to face for half a century a world that had turned aside to Arianism. The "voices" of controversy, the "thunders" of anathema which rival parties hurled at one another in those days, were voices upon earth ; they do not break, in the vision, the heavenly silence. And if an interpretation must be separately found for the "earthquake" with which the vision closes, it is enough to point to the final cleavage of the Roman world into the separate Empires of the East and West, which closed the period ; for that division was

[1] "Looking upon incense in connection with the other ceremonial observances of the Mosaic ritual, it would rather seem to be symbolical, not of prayer itself, but of that which makes prayer acceptable, the intercession of Christ."—Smith's *Bible Dictionary*.

without doubt hastened by religious controversy, and it had a most important influence on the later history of the Christian Church.

The First Four Trumpets. (Rev. viii. 7-12.)

The first four Trumpets, like the first four Seals, stand apart from the last three, and resemble one another. In the case of each group, therefore, the interpretation of all the four members should follow the same lines. The first four Seals have been explained as representing stages in the progress of the Gospel towards a position of power and independence. The first four Trumpets will be shown to represent the stages in the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. That interpretation has been objected to by some writers as too secular, too far removed from the history of Christianity. But the removal of the Empire was an event of immense religious importance: for the Empire at this period had become the bulwark of Christianity; under its protection the Church had grown strong; and its removal was to lead (as St. Paul had predicted) to a very important result—the development of the "Mystery of Iniquity."[1]

The political destinies of the Roman world do not, in fact, find any place in the Vision, until the Empire has thrown in its lot with the Christian Church, by the profession of Christianity. That profession was a gradual process, begun by Constantine, completed by Theodosius; and therefore occupying the period which is symbolised by the interval of silence in heaven. The

[1] 2 Thess. ii. 7

temples were not destroyed until about sixty years after the conversion of Constantine. The death of Theodosius, in A.D. 395, left the Empire fully committed to Christianity: and that event corresponds with the end of the silence, and the sounding of the first Trumpet.

The first clue to the meaning of the Trumpet-visions is the *trumpet-blast* by which each is introduced. The associations of the trumpets were in those early days, as those of the bugle are in our own, almost wholly military. "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound," says St. Paul, "who shall prepare himself for the battle?"[1] The Trumpets should relate to war; and war of an earthly kind, rather than the spiritual warfare which the repeated Gospel invitation, "Come," suggested in the case of the first four Seals.

Further, the first four Trumpets almost certainly let loose the "four winds of the earth," which were seen to be held back in the vision of the sealing of Israel. This explains the fact, that while no allusion to those who have been sealed, is to be found in the brief words of the first four Trumpet-visions, they are mentioned as unharmed by the fifth.[2] A protection intended for particular dangers, would only need to be referred to again if its influence extended beyond them. If then these four Trumpets correspond to the letting loose of the four storm-winds upon the earth, they may be supposed to refer, not to the common wars of which history is so full, but to some notable irruption of fierce invading armies, one after another, from different directions.

The position which these Trumpets occupy in

[1] 1 Cor. xiv. 8. [2] Rev. ix. 4.

the orderly course of the Vision provides a clue that is more definite. They follow the sixth Seal, and form a part of the seventh: being separated from the sixth Seal only by a period of "silence in heaven," which has already been shown to represent a time of rest for the Church from external enemies.

Those seventy years of rest were brought to an end by terrors of no ordinary kind. No sooner was the Empire divided between the sons of Theodosius, than the barbarous nations, which had long threatened the Northern frontiers, began a series of desolating invasions, which did not cease until the Western Empire was destroyed. The history of the time is little more than a history of invading armies (or rather, invading nations), terrible in their numbers and their strength, unsurpassed in their love of wanton destruction—following one another, like waves beating upon a stranded vessel, till they broke the Roman Empire into fragments. It is a period of history so unique in itself, and of such vast importance to the Church and to the world, that it would be strange indeed if it were overlooked in an orderly prophecy of the Christian centuries.

There need be no hesitation in following the lead of the many expositors who have found in the first four Trumpets a description of four successive waves of Barbarian conquest which came upon the Roman world in the fifth century, and brought to an end the imperial power of Rome; leaving only a feeble Empire in the East, which, in the words of Gibbon, "subsisted 1058 years in a state of premature and perpetual decay."[1]

[1] *Decline and Fall*, chap. xxxii.

The objection, that the figures used are too supernatural, too fearful in their character, to describe any purely earthly terrors, loses all its force when two things are borne in mind. One is, that in the vivid imagery of Holy Scripture, and especially of the Prophets, figures of the same kind are used for just such a purpose, again and again.[1] The other is, that when the terrors and sufferings of millions, at the hands of savage invaders, have to be condensed into a single sentence, the most fearful figures must of necessity be used. It should be remembered that the first four Trumpets occupy only six verses between them.

Nearly every detail of the Trumpet-visions is marked with the phrase *the third.* In some cases, the word *part* cannot be supplied without absurdity: but the translators have none the less supplied it. The expression may quite as well mean *third in order*, as third in division: and it evidently bears some peculiar meaning. It would seem to be a hieroglyphic mark showing that the objects to which it is attached belong to *the third empire* of Daniel's visions,—the power that ruled from Greece: as *the fourth*, used in a previous chapter, indicated *the fourth empire*, the power that ruled from Rome.

The question is dealt with more fully elsewhere.[2] It need only be pointed out here, that during the period of the seventh Seal, the Roman power moved a thousand miles to the East, from

[1] Examples of similar figures, used quite clearly as symbols, are to be found in:—Ezek. xiv. 19; Ezek. xx. 45-49, explained by chap. xxi. 1-5; Ps. xlvi. 2; Isa. xl. 6-8; Isa. xiii. 10, 13, 17, 19; Ezek. xxxii. 7, 8.

[2] Note I.

Rome to Constantinople. It became Eastern in character as well as in its capital: a revival in fact of the empire of Alexander, the third empire of Daniel's visions. It was in this Eastern form that Rome was attacked by the Barbarians, and was finally destroyed by the Turks. The Barbarian attacks occupy the first four Trumpets: the final destruction the sixth Trumpet: and it is in these Trumpets only that *the third* occurs. Later on, in the twelfth chapter, it is found once more: and its use in that case confirms in a remarkable way the suggestion which has been made as to its meaning.

The first four Trumpets thus refer to successive invasions of the Roman Empire, in the period which followed the reign of Theodosius. This conclusion does not depend upon their contents, but upon their relation to the Vision as a whole.

History records, at that particular time, three successive inroads of Barbarians, who fell upon the Roman world, devastated its fairest provinces, and twice sacked the city of Rome, which had seen no foreign enemy for six hundred years. Goths, Vandals, Huns, followed one another; and wherever they went, they left a broad track of blood and fire behind them. The city of Venice remains to this day a monument of the terror they inspired; for it was founded on the inaccessible islands of its lagoon, as a place of refuge from the invasion of the Huns.

Following these three invasions, there was what may be truly called an "invasion from within." Barbarian mercenaries in the pay of the Empire turned upon Rome, deposed the Western Emperor (who was dependent on Con-

stantinople), and set up in his place a Barbarian king of Italy. This attack was less destructive than those that preceded it, but it left more permanent results; which correspond closely with the symbolism of the fourth Trumpet.

The question naturally arises,—what brought this flood of destroyers, at this particular time, upon the Roman world?

Historians explain the matter by pointing to the invasion of the Huns from Asia. The uncivilised nations of Northern Europe, occupying the countries now known as Germany, North Austria, and Russia, had been troublesome neighbours to the Empire for more than a hundred years. Ever since the days of the Pagan Emperor Decius (A.D. 250) they had made frequent inroads, killing, burning, and pillaging the border-countries: but they had always been driven back, or had retired of their own accord to enjoy their spoils. There still remained enough power of resistance to keep them in check. Their furthest incursions never reached as far as "the eternal city."

But about A.D. 376, a change began in their attitude towards the Empire. Countless hordes of Huns, more barbarous than themselves, were pressing them from behind. These Huns appear at an earlier date in the history of China. They were driven from that country, and were started on their western migration, by the arms of a stronger race. They had gradually crossed the whole width of Asia, and now, having forced their way into Europe, they were driving before them the nations already in possession. Prominent among these were the Goths, who were driven southward upon Italy and Greece,

and the Vandals, who were driven westward upon the countries now known as France and Spain.

Thus it came about that the Goths and Vandals, by the necessities of their position, ceased to be mere plunderers of the border-provinces, and became fugitive nations seeking refuge from enemies behind them. They were as cruel and destructive as ever ; but they did not now retire with their booty, and there was no strength left in the Empire to expel them. After satisfying their love of plunder and destruction, they gradually mingled with the reduced populations of the Roman-provinces, and formed with them new "Romance" peoples. Thus, out of the ruin of the Empire, there arose the ten kingdoms into which, according to the vision given to Daniel, the Roman world was to be divided. The first four Trumpet-visions are stages in the process of destruction which led to that ten-fold division.

One last point of a general character is worthy of notice. The angels controlling the four winds, which have been shown to correspond to the first four Trumpets, were seen *waiting*, before the period of silence began. So also the Trumpet-angels were seen, *standing ready* for their office, during the whole of that period, only waiting for the signal to be given. It is in strict accordance with this, that the hosts of Barbarians, who were destined to overthrow the Empire, were seen and dreaded on the frontiers during the whole of the seventy years of rest, which gave strength and unity to the Church. But they were restrained until the first Trumpet sounded ; that is, historically, until the approach of the Huns gave the

final impulse which drove the Goths and Vandals, like storm-winds, upon the doomed Empire.[1]

The First Trumpet. (Rev. viii. 7.)

The first Trumpet brings upon the earth a storm of hail and fire mingled with blood ; by which the earth itself, the trees, and all the grass, are burnt up. That the earth is burnt up, even in part, is enough to show the highly figurative character of the whole description: for the rivers, the sea, even the ships, remain untouched by the judgments under the first Trumpet.

The limiting expression, *the third*, is applied to the earth (R.V.) and to the trees, but not to the green grass. It connects the vision with the times, and with the territory, of the Roman Empire in its later, Eastern form. Green grass is the natural symbol for transitory happiness, for the sense of ease and security which is the first thing to go in times of trouble.[2] It must have ceased to exist, in the anxious times to which these Trumpets refer, not only throughout the Empire (*the third*), but far beyond its borders. All green grass was burnt up.

The *hail* and *fire* suggest widespread destruction of property ; the *blood* suggests widespread slaughter; the *earth* burnt up,[3] the Empire ravaged ; the *trees* burnt up, the men of influence and wealth brought down ; the *grass* wholly burnt, universal misery and anxiety. The whole

[1] For the history, see note L.

[2] As in Ps. xc. 5 ; ciii. 15 ; Isa. xl. 6 ; James i. 10.

[3] R.V.

forms a vivid and appropriate picture of the effect produced by the ravages of Alaric with his Gothic hosts (A.D. 396-410). The history is full of interesting detail; but in this outline of interpretation it must be summed up in a single paragraph.

During those fourteen eventful years, the Eastern provinces were devastated by Alaric and his Gothic hosts, from the walls of Constantinople to the extremity of Greece, and from Greece to the confines of Italy. Italy itself was twice invaded by Alaric, and the second time was at his mercy for no less than four years. Rome was three times besieged. The first time, the Goths were bought off by a heavy ransom. The second time, they entered the city peaceably, to set up a usurping Emperor of Alaric's choice. The third time, they entered as conquerors and destroyers, sacking the city for six days, and selling thousands of its inhabitants into slavery. The "eternal city," which had seemed for so long the embodiment of enduring greatness, was insulted and trampled upon by a Barbarian enemy. And as if one destroyer at a time were not enough, another host of Barbarians, from Germany, had penetrated into Italy as far as Florence, and was driven back only to carry out in France ravages which Alaric himself had planned, but had not been able to accomplish. What the ravages of Barbarians meant to peaceful citizens, and especially to the wealthy and influential, may be faintly realised when we read that the city of Athens (which was among the cities that were "spared"), was left, in the words of a writer of that age, "like the bleeding and empty skin of a slaughtered victim."

The Second Trumpet. (Rev. viii. 8, 9.)

The second Trumpet introduces the vivid picture of a burning mountain cast into the sea. As a result, the sea is turned to blood, the creatures in it die, the ships upon it are destroyed. Here again, as in the first Trumpet, the combination of ideas is such that only a figurative meaning is conceivable. Here again, *the third*, several times repeated, bears the special sense to which reference has been made: and the symbol of *blood* points as before to human slaughter.

The *burning mountain* suggests, according to Old Testament usage, a powerful and aggressive kingdom.[1] The casting of it into the sea—without any special violence—indicates that it is led to become a naval power. The sea, in consequence, is turned to blood, the blood of naval warfare. That the sea is thus to be taken *literally*, in this place, and not figuratively, is shown by the mention of *ships* being destroyed, —which fixes the meaning. The living things in the sea represent the men who live a seafaring life, and whose lives and property become the prey of pirates; while the ships include many ships of war, destroyed in battle. Thus interpreted, in accordance with Bible usage, the whole forms a vivid picture of the destructive career of the Vandals under Genseric; which, like that of the Goths, must here be summed up in a single paragraph.

For nineteen years from the death of Alaric, the various tribes of Barbarians were chiefly occupied in destroying one another. But in the year A.D. 429, Genseric became king of the

[1] Jer. li. 25.

Vandals, and from that time until his death in A.D. 477, he gave the Empire no rest. Crossing from Spain into Africa, which alone among the Roman provinces had remained secure and prosperous, he ravaged, and gradually made his own, all the country from the Straits of Gibraltar to the city of Carthage. But the country was too small for his ambition,—a narrow strip shut in between the desert and the sea; and finding himself in possession of so convenient a harbour as that of Carthage, he set about making the Vandals a nation of pirates. For thirty-eight years they were the terror of the Mediterranean. They intercepted the commerce between East and West. They plundered in turn the maritime cities of the Empire, from Spain to the islands of Greece. They sacked the city of Rome, as Alaric had done, but for fourteen days instead of six, and with far more wanton destruction. They destroyed two of the largest fleets ever prepared by Rome. So great was the mischief wrought in the single reign of Genseric, that his name is one which, according to the historian Gibbon, "in the destruction of the Roman Empire, has deserved an equal rank with the names of Alaric and Attila."

The Third Trumpet. (Rev. viii. 10, 11.)

The third Trumpet would be more difficult of interpretation, if we had not the guidance of the second and the fourth, on either side. These suggest for it a meaning, with which all its details are found to harmonise. A great star falls from heaven, burning like a torch. It falls upon the rivers and springs, making them bitter,

so that many men die from their bitterness. Its name is *wormwood*, or that which makes bitter.

The expression, *the third*, again appears, and bears the same meaning as before. It is applied to all the details; for though *the fountains of waters* are spoken of without it, the effect described in the next verse is limited to *the third of the waters*, showing that the phrase is understood, though not expressed.

A *star* is the constant symbol of a *ruler;* and a star *falling from heaven* may well stand for a ruler who claims, or is supposed to wield, unseen powers. A star *burning like a torch* should indicate a ruler whose policy is violent and destructive,as in the case of a mountain burning with fire, in the previous vision. Here, it is a flaming meteor, inland; there an active volcano, always near the sea. The *rivers and springs* may mean either armies in motion (for *waters* mean *people*, Rev. xvii. 15) embittered against each other by the evil influence of the *star*, so that many die in battle; or they may mean that the *star* rules over an inland territory, in contrast to the maritime power described in the previous Trumpet. Both meanings are appropriate. The *name*, which here, as in all symbolic writing, indicates the *character*, shows that this *star* is the fruitful cause of strife and misery among men.[1]

The whole symbol is exactly fitted to describe the baneful influence of Attila and the Huns, who at this point in the history began to come into direct contact with the Roman Empire. Like the Germans of our own day, they intro-

[1] Heb. xii. 15.

duced into Europe a new spirit of violence and bloodshed. Even the Goths and Vandals might have left Rome alone, but for the impulse of the Huns. The newly Christianised Roman world might have learnt in some degree the advantages of peace, but for the Huns.

There is a peculiar fitness in some of the details, suggesting as they do the repulsive character and mischievous influence of the Huns as a nation. Their appearance from Asia had quite broken up the peace of Europe, their presence was a pledge of continual warfare. They were *a root of bitterness*, in every sense, to the European nations. They had driven the Goths and Vandals on the declining Empire, as agents of destruction. Their Paganism, repulsive appearance, and wholesale cruelty, made them an object of greater dread than either of those nations. Scarcely a soul was left alive to tell the tale of the cities which they destroyed, unless it suited them to carry off a crowd of captives. During the ten years' reign of Attila, they desolated the provinces of the Eastern Empire, simply obliterating seventy flourishing cities; and they extended the same treatment to a large part of France, and to the North of Italy. It was Attila's boast, that the grass never grew where his horse had trod.

There is, indeed, something Satanic about their leader, as described in the vision. He falls, like Satan, from heaven.[1] Nothing of the kind is said of the destroyers in the first and second Trumpets. There was something Satanic about Attila. He alone, among the destroyers of that

[1] Luke x. 18; Rev. xii. 8, 9; Rev. ix. 1.

age, was an object of superstition. A sword, which he was supposed to have received from the God of War, became an object of worship among his followers; and thus he himself (in the words of Gibbon) "acquired a sacred character, which rendered his conquests more easy and more permanent." Attila alone, among these fierce destroyers, has been remembered by a *special name* of terror, as the "Scourge of God." And if a parallel is to be found in the past for the atrocities committed to-day by German armies, it is found not in the story of the Goths or of the Vandals, Barbarians though they were, but in the regular methods of Attila and the Huns.

The Fourth Trumpet. (Rev. viii. 12.)

A sharp line of division is drawn *after* the fourth Trumpet vision, which serves to keep the four visions together, as well as to separate them from the three that follow.

The four are alike in form. Each predicts the coming of a conquering power hostile to the empire of the Romans. In the case of the first three Trumpets, this power is described under the figure of storm, or volcano, or blazing meteor, causing widespread slaughter and desolation. In the case of the fourth it is not described, but its effects are noted. As a result of being *smitten*, the sun, moon, and stars are eclipsed. The limiting expression, *the third*, appears five times, and has the same meaning as before.

The fourth Trumpet vision should describe the completion of the work begun in the first three. That work was the destruction of the Roman Empire in the West. It was completed when

the Barbarians, now well within the Empire, took possession of the central power, and ruled from Rome.

The accuracy of the symbolism is remarkable. There was marching and fighting, but there was no invasion, no destruction of cities or ravaging of country. The power of the Eastern Empire in the West was brought to an end, and a Barbarian kingdom of Italy took its place.

Sun, moon, and stars represent rulers in their several degrees: and *the third* limits the meaning here to the rulers of the Empire. When the heavenly bodies are said to be darkened or eclipsed, some great loss of authority is clearly intended. The Trumpets regard the Roman Empire as at this time still essentially one, and as a power having its real centre not in the West, but in the East. In both these particulars the prophecy is accurate, as the acts of the Senate in Italy, about this time, plainly show. They ask the Eastern Emperor to appoint their sovereign; he sends them Anthemius, the last Western Emperor to hold any real power: and when his unworthy successor is compelled by the Barbarians to abdicate, it is to Constantinople that the insignia of authority are sent, with an explanation from the Senate that a separate Emperor is no longer needed in the West. Thus the Empire made up of East and West is rightly regarded as having, up to this time, a real unity: and the fourth Trumpet predicts the blow which it suffered by what is usually described as the extinction of the Western Empire, in A.D. 476. There was no destructive invasion from without, nor was there much loss of life or property. But there was an important lessening of Roman

authority: the long line of Western Emperors was abruptly ended. The Roman Empire, already centred in the East, lost its Western limb altogether, and became nothing but an Eastern power. It never recovered more than an outpost in the West, the province known as the Exarchate: a slender relic of its old authority, lost to the Lombards in A.D. 751, and by them finally to the Papacy in A.D. 755.

The agents of destruction were Barbarians, as in the former Trumpets; but they were in this case in the pay of the Empire. It was a mutiny, not an invasion. Realising their power, and the weakness to which successive invasions had reduced their rulers, they were quite ready to follow a bold leader in taking forcible possession of Italy. Odoacer, a prince of the Heruli by birth, was the successful general who deposed the last Emperor of the West, and set up in Italy a Barbarian kingdom. It is only necessary to turn to the pages of Gibbon, the historian of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, to be assured of the critical importance of this event, and of its right to a place in the prophetic vision.

But some readers, at this point, will be asking the natural question, "Why should secular history have a place in the Apocalypse at all? The first four Trumpet-visions have been given a wholly secular meaning."

That is true: and it calls for explanation. The explanation is to be found in the transcendent importance to Christianity of the power that rules from Rome.

Christ was born into the Roman Empire: the power that ruled from Rome had its representatives in Herod and in Pilate. Ever since those

days, Rome has been the centre of a power greatly affecting, for good or ill, the destinies of Christianity.

At first violently hostile, in Pagan days, then changed into a rather dangerous friend and patron, in the days of Constantine, the secular power of Rome was finally bequeathed, as it were, to the Church itself, in the person of the Pope, and the consequences were disastrous to Christianity.

This transfer of power, from Emperor to Pope, was a very gradual process. It would never have happened, but for two *secular* events. The first was the moving of the seat of empire a thousand miles to the East, in the days of Constantine. The second was the destruction of the power of the Empire in the West, by successive waves of Barbarian invasion. These two events, though in themselves secular, thus come to have great religious importance. The *first* is predicted by St. Paul in his second Thessalonian Epistle: the hindering power must be *taken out of the way* before the development of the apostasy can take place.[1] *The second is the subject of the first four Trumpet-visions.*

But perhaps because such a subject, however great its indirect importance, is in itself secular, the space given to it in the Apocalypse is strictly limited. The first four Trumpets occupy only six verses between them: yet they describe the death-agony of a power that changed the face of Europe, and left so permanent an influence behind it, that the "ghost of old Rome," invoked by the Papacy, was able to rule over Christen-

[1] 2 Thess. ii. 7: "out of the middle," literally.

dom for a thousand years, and is not done with yet.

The Fifth and Sixth Trumpets. (Rev. ix.)

The Trumpets that remain are evidently more severe, either in themselves or in their consequences, than the first four. They are described as "Woes," and are introduced with a three-fold cry of "Woe," uttered by an eagle flying in mid-heaven.

The fifth and sixth Trumpets, which follow at once, have a good deal in common. They are separated only by one verse; but that verse is evidently intended to indicate a lapse of time between them. In each of them, hosts of destroyers are let loose, having the appearance of cavalry; the riders wear breastplates, the horses have scorpion tails, which inflict great suffering; and the onset is fierce and irresistible.

The early writers could make nothing of the complicated symbolism of these two visions. The only coherent explanation of them that has ever been offered is not older than the Reformation. It identifies the first Woe with the Saracen invasions, the second with those of the Turks.

This view must be judged on its merits, not by its want of antiquity. The early writers lived before Mohammed's time. Those who lived in the days of Moslem aggression had the most fantastic ideas about Mohammed and his creed. It was not till after the Reformation that Christians had any clear knowledge about Islam, by which to test its relation to the Woe-Trumpets.

Looking merely at the form and position of these two visions, there are sound reasons for

expecting to find in them the doings of Saracens and Turks.

In the first place, the orderly progress of the Revelation, in its numbered symbols, has at this point carried prophetic history as far as the end of the Western Empire in A.D. 476. The *next thing* of first-rate importance to the history of Christianity is the appearance of Mohammed. The fifth Trumpet might naturally be expected to deal in some way with Mohammedanism, as a new and terrible enemy to Christendom.

Secondly, if the religion of Mohammed was to be dealt with at all, it would be in just such a form as these two visions present. It was not the doctrine, but the invasions, that disturbed the Christian Church. History divides those invasions into two groups, associated with two quite distinct races, coming from different directions, and separated by an interval that is measured by centuries. The Saracens and Turks had in common nothing but their fanatical zeal for the Moslem faith. The descendants of both races are still Moslem, and still quite distinct. Thus two separate visions, marked by many resemblances but also by many differences, would best correspond with the facts of history.

Thirdly, the importance of Mohammedanism as affecting Church history is so great, that no systematic prophecy of the destinies of the Church would be complete without a reference to it.

The Moslem capture of Palestine and of the Holy City led to the long series of Crusades, in which Christian Europe exhausted itself to no purpose. The capture of North Africa swept away Christianity itself from countries which

had long been a nursery of faith. The capture of one half of Spain left among its people a legacy of fierce intolerance, which bore fruit in after days, almost to the undoing of the Christian religion. And the capture of Constantinople, besides almost destroying the Eastern Church, established the Turks as a thorn in the side of Christian Europe,—to this very day. Mohammedanism must find a place in the scheme of the Apocalypse, and nowhere more naturally than at this point.

The two visions are long and complicated, and this is only an outline of interpretation. The general argument has been shortly stated: a paraphrase of the essential points of the symbolism will now be given. With it will be associated, point by point, in the fewest possible words, suggestions as to its meaning.

The Fifth Trumpet. (Rev. ix. 1-11.)

The fifth Trumpet sounds, and a star is seen fallen already (R.V.) from heaven to the earth: a personal being, as the words that follow indicate. He is more than human, for he is given power to open the pit of the Abyss, the place of all evil.

This passage suggests another, which, though in a later chapter, refers to earlier events. The Dragon, in the twelfth chapter, defeated by the heroism and death of Christian martyrs, is cast out from heaven to the earth. There, as here, the fall is a cause of woe to the world of men.[1] *The fall is, in fact, in both places the same.* The

[1] Compare Rev. viii. 13 with Rev. xii. 12.

woe spoken of in that chapter as the consequence of Satan's defeat, is in the last verse of the eighth chapter seen to be *threefold*: and to include the troubles and sufferings which afflict the Church of Christ under the fifth, sixth, and seventh Trumpets, at three different periods of history.[1]

It has often been debated, whether the revolution which took place under Constantine was a blessing or a curse to the cause of Christianity. These visions provide the answer. It was a great and decisive victory, for it turned Paganism out of the Roman world. But it did not put an end to Satan's enmity; and the three "Woes" were each of them the outcome of that enmity, all the more active "because he knoweth that he hath but a short time."[2]

The fallen star opens *the pit of the abyss*,—and lets loose a confused mass of false doctrine and evil principles, the *smoke of the pit*,—to darken the world. Out of the smoke come locusts—but not literal locusts. They spare the one thing locusts would destroy, the produce of the fields. They only injure men. They are fanatical Moslems, bidden to do no harm to tree or field, but urged on by a false creed of physical violence, to attack and destroy the followers of Christ.

Their religion made into virtues their besetting sins,—violence, robbery, and lust,—and promised endless sensual pleasures as the reward of death in battle.

During this first or Saracen period of Mohammedanism, the warriors were almost wholly Arabs, and as they issued from Arabia, tribe after tribe,

[1] Rev. ix. 12. [2] Rev. xii. 12.

to settle down and feed upon the richer countries around, they resembled nothing so much as the swarms of locusts to which the prophecy compares them.

One group of men was to be exempt from injury—those sealed for preservation in a previous vision:[1] that is, as has been shown, *the Jewish people.*

Here is a confirmatory proof of right interpretation, in this passage and in that one. The Moslems, except in their first conflicts within Arabia itself, never seriously harmed the Jews. They had too much in common. Local exceptions to this general attitude of toleration, and at times the obligation imposed upon the Jews to wear a distinctive dress, do not alter this fact. The Jews profited by the Moslem conquests; and their golden age, since their dispersion, was their life under the Moors in Spain.

The exemption of Israel from injury by Moslems is not again referred to in the Apocalypse: but it has remained effective to the present day. The Jews in Europe would scarcely have survived the Middle Ages, had they not been able to escape, in the worst times of persecution, from Christian to Moslem lands.

The locusts do not kill, but inflict, for five months, the pain of a scorpion's sting, which is in their tails.

Now the *tail* is in Scripture symbolic of defeat and degradation.[2] The *sting* of conquest is found in the continued arrogance of the conqueror. The Saracens did not kill except in

[1] Rev. vii. 1-8.

[2] Deut. xxviii. 13, 44; Rev. xii. 4.

battle. They reduced conquered Christians to tribute and degradation, worse than death.

In those days there was to be a new thing: *a search for a death that cannot be found.*[1] The meaning has been strangely overlooked. It is surely the *fanatical desire for death on the battle-field*, as the sure road to heaven, which is here intended. The Moslem warrior sought death and *seldom found it*, because in the battles of old time such a spirit of reckless courage could bear down all opposition, and only *death in battle with the infidel would ensure Paradise.*

The locusts are next described: they are *like horses*, but the further particulars suggest rather the mythical Centaurs, half horses and half men. On their heads is a covering described as *crown-like* and *gold-looking*, but not actually a crown nor made of gold. The suggestion is that of a *yellow turban.*[2] Their faces are *man-like*, perhaps because *bearded;* their hair *woman-like*, because *long*. Their teeth, *lion-like*, ready to devour and to destroy, not green things, but the wealth of conquered nations.[3] Breastplates like iron may be figurative of hard-heartedness, absence of pity; or they may simply be mentioned as naturally connected with cavalry. The wings of the locust-horsemen make a loud noise, as is the case with real locusts. They have as their king,—unlike real locusts, which have no leader,—the Angel of the Abyss. This would seem to be Satan, who for the time being holds the key of the Abyss,[4] and in connection with this locust-

[1] Verse 6.

[2] For another interpretation, see Note N.

[3] As in Jer. v. 17. [4] Rev ix. 1.

plague may well have the name of Apollyon, or Destroyer.

The duration of the activity of the plague is twice described as *five months.* This is the usual limit of a locust-plague: but in this place it is probably intended to bear a symbolic meaning. It may be taken, a day for a year, as limiting the aggressive power of the Saracens to 150 years. They were conquerors only for about that time, afterwards settling down and ceasing to be any longer a danger to Christendom.[1]

Mohammed did not merely launch a conquering army or nation on the Roman world. He introduced a fanatical religion, which influenced Asia and Africa even more than Europe. Accordingly, there is no limiting expression attached to the fifth Trumpet, though it is attached to the first four and to the sixth. The Saracens broke out on all sides, with no definite objective: but the Turks, like the Barbarians in earlier days, directed their attacks mainly against the Roman Empire, in its Greek or Eastern form. It was their destiny to fight against, and finally to destroy, *the third* of men.[2]

This point will be considered in connection with the sixth Trumpet, to which it properly belongs.

The three centuries which separate the fulfilment of the first Woe from that of the second, the Saracen menace from that of the Turks, correspond with the suggestion of a lapse of time in Rev. ix. 12, as compared with the statement of Rev. xi. 14, which suggests only a *short*

[1] See Note G. [2] Rev. ix. 15.

interval between the second Woe and the third. The interval in that case was less than a century (A.D. 1700-1789).

The Sixth Trumpet. (Rev. ix. 13-21.)

At the sounding of the sixth Trumpet an order is given from the four horns of the altar to the Trumpet-angel, bidding him set free the four angels who were restrained at the Euphrates.

Four horns, four angels, recall the symbolism of Daniel's vision of the third Empire, the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great,—with its four heads, four horns, four wings; and its destiny, to break up into four kingdoms.

If the Turkish Empire is the subject of the sixth Trumpet, the connection of the prophecy with the third Empire of Daniel's visions is explained. The Turks, after centuries of hostility, not only destroyed the revived Greek Empire, but *themselves took its place*, and occupy it to this day.

Turkish history, and Turkish methods of warfare in that age, do in fact correspond with the details of this prophecy.

The destroying power, into which the four angels at once resolve themselves, was to start from the Euphrates, and to be directed against the Greek Empire. The Turks began their conquering career from the Euphrates, receiving at Bagdad, not twenty miles from that river, their commission as protectors of Islam, which was the starting-point of their Empire. First under the Seljuk dynasty, then under the Othmans, their history is practically continuous, until they appear as conquerors of the Greek Empire.

During the whole of that period, nearly four hundred years, the Greek Empire was their enemy, and Constantinople their goal.

The number of the horsemen is given as two hundred millions,[1] a number which simply leaves the reader puzzled; but the Turkish armies were made up of cavalry, and they were so numerous and efficient that they might well appear to be countless. St. John explains that he heard the number. Was he allowed to hear the voice of Eastern exaggeration, or of Western panic, and to record it?

The detailed description of the horsemen contains features which are difficult to explain without seeming to make the prophecy too commonplace, simply because they are so definite, while our faith in the foreknowledge of God is so shadowy. Considering the fact that the capture of Constantinople was brought about mainly by the use of cannon of a size then new to warfare, and that the contemporary accounts of the siege lay great stress upon their size and destructiveness—it is difficult to avoid the conclusion, that the fire and smoke and sulphur, out of the mouth of the horse, twice mentioned, and spoken of as the deciding factor in the final attack, are meant to refer to the important part played by gunpowder in the final result. And considering that Turkish Pashas have always used horse-tails (one or more according to rank), as insignia

[1] "Two myriads of myriads": the word *myriad*, though literally 10,000, is generally used in the Bible as describing a *countless number*: so in Luke xii. 1; Rev. v. 11, recalling Dan. vii. 10; Jude 14, recalling Deut. xxxiii. 2; and Heb. xii. 22. This constant use of the word sufficiently explains the verse.

of office—it is difficult not to find some allusion to this fact in the statement as to the horses that "their power is in their tails." But in this latter case, there is an alternative meaning which is satisfactory and sufficient, a reference to the after-bitterness of Turkish conquest: the tail symbolising, as elsewhere, the place of the conquered; the sting, as in the case of the fifth Trumpet, the arrogance of the conquerors.

These identifications, though they have an interest of their own, need not be relied on, for they are not required as evidence. The Turks are quite plainly, on many other grounds, the subject of the sixth Trumpet. The context and the nature of the prophecy; its resemblances to the fifth Trumpet, whose meaning cannot be mistaken; the four-fold mark, and Euphratean origin; the armies of cavalry; and the final issue—all combine to compel a reference to the Turkish power, apart from any argument derived from horse-tails or from gunpowder.

One point remains—the period of time, expressed in an unusual form, in connection with the career of the horsemen. They were prepared for the particular work of putting an end to *the third* or Greek Empire. That end came in A.D. 1453. But they were prepared "for the hour, and day and month and year": and that expression, found as it is in the midst of symbolism, and so strangely expressed, must mean more than "for the particular time" when they would fulfil their destiny. The added words, *day and month and year*, may be meant as a measure of time, symbolically expressed: 391 days representing, on the principle of time-symbolism, 391 years. Alp Arslan, from whose reign may be dated, quite

definitely, the rise of the Turkish Empire, succeeded in A.D. 1063. From that date to the taking of Constantinople in A.D. 1453, is 390 years, as usually reckoned, but 391 years, if the opening and closing years are both counted, according to Hebrew custom.

Prophecy and fulfilment have been shown to be in close agreement in the case of the fifth and sixth Trumpets. The conquering fanaticism that sought death in battle as the highest good : the two quite distinct military developments of a new creed, among two races, at separate times : the immunity of the Jews alone, while all others suffer : the masses of cavalry, armies in themselves, bearing down all opposition: the brilliant Eastern colouring of breastplate and turban: the after-bitterness of conquest by the zealots of a merciless creed : the limit of time set in the one case to conquest, in the other to resistance: even, perhaps, the horse-tail standards of the leaders, and the cannon and gunpowder that decided the result, which was nothing less than the loss of the East to Christianity as a punishment for its sins—all these things, familiar now to the reader of Moslem history, were written down centuries beforehand in St. John's record of the fifth and sixth Trumpet-visions.

The extinction of the Western Empire, in A.D. 476, predicted under the fourth Trumpet, had great religious importance, for it left the Papal power in possession of the West. The extinction of the Eastern Empire, in A.D. 1453, predicted under the sixth Trumpet, had great religious importance, for it left the Turks in possession of the East. Their creed was firmly seated within the boundaries of Europe, the

Eastern Church was reduced to impotence, and influences were set in motion which brought about, in the West, first the revival of learning, and then the Protestant Reformation. It is natural that secular events of which the consequences to Christianity were so important, should be given a prominent place in a systematic prophecy of the destinies of the Christian religion.

The Greek Empire appears no more in prophecy or in history; except in the twelfth chapter of this prophecy, which is partly retrospective, and looks back as far as to the birth of Christ. Its long and inglorious career served one important purpose, to hold back the Moslem menace long enough to save the Christianity of Europe.

The last verses of the chapter seem to suggest that judgment fell upon it as a penalty for its corruption and idolatry. But the "rest of the men, not killed,"—that is, the kingdoms that were left, now that the Empires, East and West, had gone,—showed no repentance, learnt no lesson, till the Reformation brought a painful awakening to the Christian world.

Measuring and Witnessing. (Rev. x., xi.)

The sixth Trumpet runs on into the tenth and eleventh chapters. A change occurs of subject and of symbolism, but there is no suggestion of arrested movement. The contents of these chapters are in fact bound up with the sixth Trumpet by the words with which they close; "the second Woe is past; behold, the third Woe cometh quickly."[1] It is therefore a recommenda-

[1] Rev. xi. 14; verses 15-19 belong to the seventh Trumpet.

tion, that the interpretation given in this outline makes them refer to events, which not only followed those of the sixth Trumpet in the matter of *time*, but also from considerations of *cause and effect*.

A strong angel, almost a divine figure, brings to earth *a little open book*. There are loud voices, his own and another, and then he proclaims that now,—at that point in Christian history—there is to be *no more delay*[1] in the understanding of some long hidden secret, declared already in Scripture prophecy, but not *till then* understood. The secret is contained apparently, in the *little book*. If so, it is contained in the Apocalypse; for St. John is bidden to take and eat the *little book*, and is then told that he must *prophesy again*,—that is, presumably, must reveal to some later age than his own,—the contents of this open book. It is hinted that the message so delivered will have *political* importance, for the prophesying is to be *about peoples and nations, and tongues, and kings*.

In connection apparently with this commission, St. John is bidden to *measure* the temple, altar, and worshippers;—applying to them some kind of *test*,—but to leave out of consideration the outer court, which is given up to the Gentiles, who for forty-two months will profane the Holy City.

In connection, further, with St. John's commission, for there is no break or pause, Christ's *two witnesses* are introduced. For forty-two months they are to prophesy in sackcloth. There is something unique about them, which

[1] Rev. x. 6: R.V. margin.

makes them difficult to describe,—for they are in turn candlesticks, olive-trees, prophets; and though not open to injury, they can suffer death, and be raised again to life; and they have between them but *one body*.[1]

Their part in the vision is *impersonal*; they speak no word, do no action, though their office is to prophesy, and though they die and rise again.

They are killed by *the Beast from the Abyss*, a power which appears again, and is described in a later chapter[2]; their dead body is left for all to mock at in the street of the great world-city, for three days and a half; the world is glad to be rid of them. Suddenly they revive; they are called up to heaven; their enemies are afraid; there is an earthquake, the *tenth* of the city falls, 7,000 men are killed, and at last the enemies acknowledge the hand of God.

The above is a fair paraphrase of the two chapters, which must in any case be taken together and treated as a whole, for there are no suggestions of division, and the chapter-division only misleads.

The point already reached in the orderly progress of the Apocalypse, is the ruin of the Eastern Church and Empire by the Moslems, in A.D. 1453. The next great movement in connection with Christianity was the Reformation, which is usually, and rightly, dated from A.D. 1517, when Luther fixed his Theses on the door at Wittemberg. There is a very definite connection between the one crisis and the other. Historians

[1] In verses 8 and 9, but not in verse 10.

[2] Rev. xvii. 8.

are agreed, that the Greek scholars, who were driven westward by the Turks, had much to do with the Revival of Learning in the West; and that that Revival, aided by the invention of printing, which put the New Testament into the hands of the people, brought about the Reformation. There is another connection as well. The Turkish power, now seated at Constantinople, had gone on increasing, and was at its greatest at the moment of the birth of the Reformation. The armies of Christendom were fully employed in warding off the Turkish menace, and so the separated movements of reform had time to spread and to consolidate before any organised attempt was made to put them down.

This section of the Book, which is attached as a kind of sequel to the sixth Trumpet, might therefore appropriately deal with the Protestant Reformation.

Let the contents of the two chapters be thus interpreted, and the result examined, verse by verse.

The mighty angel will be Christ,—or better, His angel, or special messenger.[1] The loud cry, compared to the lion's roar, will be the challenge of truth, rediscovered in the New Testament, and reverberating through Christendom, though voiced at first only by the humble agency of Luther. The answering voices, not worthy of record by St. John, will be the Papal anathema, which Luther, greatly daring, burnt in public;

[1] He has one foot on the sea, the other on the earth. The appeal of the Reformation was to the *people* and to the *rulers* of Germany, for different reasons. Ranke notes that its success was due to this real, if unacknowledged, alliance.—*Hist. of Ref. in Germany*, p. 155.

for *seven* is the number of the Church, and thunder is the constant simile quite naturally used for Papal curses.[1] The angel's oath, that now, at last, a *secret* declared but not understood by the prophets is to be revealed,—will relate to the discovery then made, as a direct consequence of those voices of anathema, that the great apostasy, mysteriously predicted in Daniel, by St. Paul, and in the Apocalypse, had at that moment its centre in Rome, its head in the Pope.

In the eating of the little open book, the sweet taste, the bitter sequel, the prophesying again, the wide political consequences,—will be seen St. John, living again (in a figure) in Reformation days: and in that representative capacity, realising, as the Protestants then did, for the first time, the meaning of that particular prediction; finding the knowledge sweet to the taste, for it brought with it a new spiritual liberty, but bitter in the end, for it resulted in conflict and martyrdom: and prophesying *again*, through the newly-understood Apocalypse, to that and all later ages, the destinies of the ten kingdoms, and their relations with the Papal power,—with results that affected the whole of Roman Christendom.

The measuring-rod given to St. John will be the Bible, made at that time the supreme test of the faith and worship of the Church: but not applied, even then, to the Eastern Church, or Eastern lands, for they were under the heel of Islam, and they had suffered enough to be spared from the painful experience of a Reformation.

Christ's two Witnesses will be the Old and

[1] Note J.

New Testaments, which bear a two-fold witness under one cover. They cannot be properly described except by a series of symbols. They are sources of spiritual life—*olive trees*.[1] They are bearers of spiritual light—*lamp-stands*.[2] They contain words of power, which have made them feared even when not obeyed, and have kept them uncorrupted.[3] They are, at the same time, *witnesses* to Christ and to the truth of God, acting personally though inanimate:[4] for the Holy Spirit speaks through them. They are *prophets* conveying God's messages of grace and of warning,—and for that very reason they have often proved to be *not peace but a sword* in the world, *turning waters to blood.*

The complex reality answers to the complex symbolism, and the conclusion arrived at is confirmed by the analogy of the strangest part of it—their death and resurrection. The Word Incarnate, Christ, was killed, though divine, and rose from the dead, to the discomfiture of His enemies. The Word Written, the Bible, is here killed in figure, though divine, and rises from the dead, with the same result. In each case, there is a divine side and a human, combined and inseparable. In each case there is an inherent power against injury as long as God wills it. Those who "desired to injure" were powerless—*until the witness was completed.* Not till then did Christ yield Himself to die: not till then did the Bible seem for a time powerless. And in each case there came an *ascension to heaven*: Christ, to God and to His Throne, as

[1] Zech. iv. 3, 6. [2] Zech. iv. 2.
[3] Jer. v. 14. [4] John v. 39.

of right : the Bible, to the "high places of the earth," recognised as it has been *only since the Reformation*, as an authority higher than the Church ; the rule of faith and practice.

The death of the Witnesses will be, historically, the utter silence of all Protestant witness during the three and a half years preceding the date of Luther's Theses : a silence which was a cause of triumph and rejoicing in the Council at Rome, and among the Church leaders of that day, but was succeeded by a sudden outburst of Protestant life and testimony, as a *final* result of which the Bible *ascended* to a place of honour and authority never before allowed to it by a jealous Church.

The witnessing *in sackcloth*[1] will be understood as symbolic of the use made of the Bible throughout the time of Papal domination, (a time limited in several passages to the period of three and a half symbolic years, or 42 months), as keeping in the background its good news of God, of life and immortality, and bringing out rather the darker side, the threats and warnings of judgment to come. A priesthood that claimed a monopoly of the means of grace could only in this way maintain its power. The Bible did indeed prophesy, but in sackcloth, until the Reformation gave the New Testament to the people, and with it a new liberty of interpretation.

The fall of *the tenth* of the city will symbolise the falling away of one of the ten kingdoms from allegiance to the Papal power ;—that is, England, first under Henry VIII., but completely,

[1] 2 Sam. iii. 31 : Ps. xxx. 11.

in the Revolution of A.D. 1688 and the Settlement of A.D. 1697. The city stands for the Roman world. England was the last country *added* to the Western Empire, and so, in a sense, the tenth of the ten kingdoms of which it was made up.

The loss of 7,000 slain, and the consequence, that the enemies give glory to God,—will represent the victories of Protestants in the Reformation wars, which brought about the final recognition of Protestantism, and its establishment in the countries that had adopted it.[1]

Thus the two chapters are occupied with a prophecy about the relations between the Bible and the Church, with special reference to the Reformation. The subject is in its right place, for the Reformation followed, and was connected with, the success of the Turks in Europe, predicted under the sixth Trumpet. A new understanding of part of the Apocalypse is here predicted, as connected with the Reformation. Such a connection is actually to be found in the history of the period, and its importance is unmistakable.

The efforts of the Reformers might easily have remained as the vain enthusiasm of earnest men, whose names would have been added to the long list of "heretics," and whose virtues history would not have been allowed to record. But they realised, almost suddenly,[2] the long-hidden meaning of one part of this prophecy; the part which predicted a widespread, plausible, long-enduring apostasy within the Church itself.

[1] For another interpretation, see Note L.

[2] Between A.D. 1517 and A.D. 1521.

They recognised in the Church of Rome the Babylon of the Apocalypse.

It was the realisation of this truth that set the Reformers free. From Luther onwards, they held it as one man. It broke the spell which the long ascendancy of Rome, Pagan and Papal, had cast over Western Christendom. The Papal Church, wedded to its corruptions, was ready to persecute to the death those who wished to reform it. The Reformers now realised that all this had been predicted long before, and that the earthly organisation was not the same thing as the true Church of God. They heard the cry, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues," and they obeyed it. The permanence of the effects of the Reformation was due to their obedience.

This is a matter of history, rather than of interpretation. Whether the identification of Rome with Babylon be right or wrong, it did, as a matter of fact, have these important consequences. It put a sword into the hands of the Protestants against which the advocates of the Papacy could do nothing. It gave to the separated movements of reform, in their conflict with Rome, the strength that comes from unity.

The prophecy, in its second part, has still for its subject the Bible and the Reformation, but it is the whole Bible, and the outlook is a wider one. It looks back—from the point reached—to the long Papal period, during which the Bible was given a subordinate place, and its message was only half-delivered. It pauses at the crisis in the conflict, when for a time the cause of the Bible seemed altogether lost, and the Papal

Church triumphant. Finally, it describes the unexpected victory, the great change to religious liberty, with an open Bible as the supreme rule of faith.

With that victory the seventh Trumpet sounds, and introduces new times and new conditions. Liberty will become licence, faith will decay: but these things are not as yet described. Long chapters—connected no doubt with the secret of the Little Book—are interposed. The main thread of the prophecy is not taken up again until the fifteenth chapter, where the conditions ending this chapter appear again: the same kind of praise, the same open temple, the ark of the testimony:— and the series of numbered symbols is there resumed and completed.

There are many in our day who have a strong bias against the kind of interpretation here offered. They put the Church before the Bible, and consider the Reformation a mistake. That question is not argued here, and no assumptions are made. The prophecy is simply compared with the facts of history.

Let those who object deny, if they can, the cumulative evidence of the crowded symbolism of the ninth chapter, in its application to the progress of Islam: an application which compels a reference, in the tenth and eleventh chapters, to succeeding events, and just such events as resulted from the Reformation. Let them deny, if they can, the cumulative evidence of the crowded symbolism of the twelfth chapter, now to be considered, in its application to well-known features of religious history now past. The evidence for the meaning of these covering chapters is irresistible. They relate to past events in

Christian history; and the tenth and eleventh chapters, lying as they do between them, must also be applied to the past, not to the future: and to a time not far from that of the Reformation. They must have an historical interpretation: and that which is offered in this outline claims to deal fairly with the symbolism, and to be in agreement with the facts of history.

The History of Satan's Disguises. (Rev. xii., xiii., xiv.)

The next three chapters form a parenthesis in the orderly progress of the Apocalypse, and must be read together, and placed in connection with two later chapters, Rev. xvii. and xviii.

The section contains no reference to Seals, Trumpets, or Vials: that is to say, it is detached from the thread and continuity of the Vision, and is of the nature of an explanation.

It is occupied chiefly with Wild-Beast symbolism, recalling the symbolism found in the Book of Daniel. The chief difficulties in interpretation are removed, in this case as in that, by an inspired interpreter. As a consequence, it is possible for the unbiassed reader to reach a high degree of certainty as to the meaning of the passage, which will be shown to describe and predict the history of Satan's disguises—the agencies employed by him in his warfare against Christ and Christianity.

At the same time, an air of mystery is given to the prophecy by a challenge to the reader to interpret *the number of the Beast*, six hundred and sixty-six.

The Woman and the Dragon. (Rev. xii.)

The section, being explanatory, goes back and begins at the true beginning—the birth of Christ. The first five verses of the twelfth chapter are not prediction, but history expressed in prophetic language. For that reason, they give valuable help in fixing the meaning of some prophetic symbols.

It has been truly said, that any interpretation which explains the fifth verse of anything but *the birth and ascension of Christ* stands self-condemned. No other child was ever born, or will be, in figure or in fact, who is to *rule all nations*, and to be caught up to God, and to *His Throne.*

In scripture things literal are constantly mingled with things figurative.[1] There is no objection whatever to finding here a literal child born of a figurative mother. For the Woman is Israel, the Daughter of Zion—a *great sign* or symbol, seen at the moment of her highest privilege, as chosen of God to bring into the world the "desire of all nations," the literal Christ.

If this be made the starting-point of the interpretation of the chapter, it opens up the meaning of the rest, as a key opens a lock. And the twelfth chapter, thus rightly understood, opens up the meaning of the whole Book: for it is crowded with symbolism which is found, and needs interpreting, elsewhere. Christ in this way

[1] An apt illustration occurs in Daniel's vision of the Four Beasts. The fourth Beast, which, like the other three, is a *symbol of an earthly ruling power*, is brought before the same Throne as the Son of Man,—the *literal Christ*, who there receives His kingdom. (Dan. vii. 9-14.)

becomes Himself the key to the meaning of the Apocalypse which is His gift.

A great sign is seen in heaven: a Woman clothed with the sun, standing on the moon, crowned with twelve stars, travailing in birth.

Her identity is determined by the fact that she brings forth Christ, and that being a *symbol*, she cannot be the Virgin Mary. She is the "Daughter of Zion" of the old Prophets[1]: the Jewish people, or Jewish Church: "to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever."[2]

The symbol might almost be a comment on the verse quoted. There are *the fathers*, the old patriarchs, represented by a crown of twelve *stars*,—as Joseph saw them in his dream.[3] There is the *glory* of the sun as a covering. Under her feet, as her support, is the *moon*, bright with the *reflected* glory of the sun; a figure, as it would seem, of *Moses*, with all that his name meant to Israel, of *law* and *covenant* and *service* and *promise:* a figure peculiarly appropriate, for it was Moses who, as the mediator of the old covenant, brought down from Sinai "on the skin of his face," the reflection of God's glory.[4] And in the whole symbol, thus complete, there is seen the chosen people, *of whom*,

[1] Micah iv. 10: v. 3: especially.

[2] Rom. ix. 4, 5.

[3] Gen. xxxvii. 9.

[4] Exod. xxxiv. 29-35; 2 Cor. iii. 7-18.

as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all,—destined to rule all nations.[1]

The Woman is seen *in heaven*, but so also is the dragon ; and the *war in heaven*, which results in the dragon's fall *from heaven*, is found to be fought out on earth. So it is evident that the heaven of this passage is not the place of God's Throne, but the place of earthly authority and privilege. There is no confusion here ; when God's heaven is meant, another expression is used. The Man-child is caught away, in His ascension, not to heaven, but *to God and to His Throne.*

Opposed to the Woman is a great red Dragon, lying in wait to kill the child as soon as it is born. It is Satan, in Roman disguise ; Satan, making use of the Roman Empire as his agent against Christ. The ten horns identify the figure with the Fourth Beast of Daniel's Vision.[2] The seven heads, not found in the earlier symbol, have a special meaning, which is explained in the seventeenth chapter. All that need here be said about them is that the seven crowns seen upon them are an indication of time ; for they show the Roman power at its greatest, imperial and undivided, in contrast with its condition as seen in later symbols.

The Dragon's tail is seen drawing the *third* of the stars which it has already cast down, to earth.[3] That is to say, Satan's Roman agent, at the time here indicated, had conquered, and was

[1] Rev. ii. 26, 27.

[2] Dan. vii. 7.

[3] "His tail *is drawing* (present tense) ..... and *did cast down* (past tense) to the earth."

ruling over, the princes of the fragments of the *third* or Greek empire, the empire of Alexander the Great.[1] The symbol is very accurate, for Rome's method with the Eastern States was to set up subject kings, and rule through them; stars fallen to earth, for they had no real power.

The meaning of this detail, and its importance in the prophecy, have been missed by all expositors.

Christ was born into the Roman Empire, and the fact was of great importance. It allowed Satan to use Roman officials, Herod and Pilate, for his purposes. It also gave to the Gospel message the advantage of the languages and communications of the Roman world. St. Paul could say with truth, of the death and resurrection of Christ, "this thing was not done in a corner."[2] But Palestine had only been Roman for about sixty years; it was in fact the last but one of the fragments of the Greek Empire annexed or conquered by Rome.

The Child is born; His destiny is to rule all nations with a rod of iron; and He is caught up to God, and to His Throne. These statements can have but one meaning.

But the intervening tragedy is omitted: the tragedy of the Cross. One consequence of that tragedy is recorded,—the only one which it had, at that time, for the Jewish people, who are here the main subject. The Woman becomes an exile; she has lost all her glory and privilege, except the privilege of being kept alive.

The short historical retrospect, of five verses, is here ended, and prophecy begins again with

[1] Note I. [2] Acts xxvi. 26.

the woman's flight. The Jews had suffered terribly, but were not wholly scattered, at the time when the Apocalypse was given.

Before many years had passed, their predicted exile was complete. They were found for centuries, in every country but their own,—kept always on the move, hated and oppressed, often robbed and massacred. And in the "*wilderness* of the peoples" into which they had been driven,[1] they were in great danger of national extinction.

But God had promised that they should survive as a people, as long as the sun and moon endured.[2] He protected them in their exile, not indeed from injury, but from extermination, exactly in the way predicted in this passage. He *prepared a place* for them; an earthly place, as for Christians He has prepared a heavenly. They were to become the merchants and bankers of Christendom. The causes leading up to that result may be traced, and are interesting, but they do not concern the interpretation of the Apocalypse. The fact is well-known; and it was because the Jews had become "an economic necessity" to Christendom, that they survived as a people, rich enough to hold their own, in spite of all oppression,—supported, or as the prophecy puts it, *fed* or *nourished*,[3] grudgingly enough, by their Christian enemies.

The time named, twelve hundred and sixty days, is the time during which they were in special danger. It is identical with the duration of the Apostasy presently described,[4] and with

[1] Ezek. xx. 35. [2] Jer. xxxi. 35, 36.
[3] vv. 6, 14. [4] Rev. xiii. 5.

the time during which the Witnesses prophesy in sackcloth.[1] It is given in three forms, but never —*because it is a symbol*—in the ordinary form of three years and a half.

The child has been caught away to God; the Woman is safe, though a fugitive, and another conflict occupies for a time the vacant stage. It is described as *war in heaven;* and its meaning might be hard to find, but for the eleventh verse, in which all symbolism is dropped, and the victory is attributed to the heroism of Christian martyrs.

The meaning is fixed by that verse. The "war in heaven" *is fought out on earth by men*, however important the part taken by unseen powers. And as the Dragon is on one side, and Christian martyrs on the other, nothing else can be intended than the conflict of Christianity with the Paganism of the Roman Empire, which resulted after nearly three centuries of struggle and martyrdom, in a complete victory for Christianity, in the days of Constantine.

That victory has been already twice referred to in the Apocalypse; first in the sixth Seal, which describes it from the earthly side,—the *stages* that led up to it, and the *panic* it produced among the enemies of Christ;[2] and secondly, in the fifth Trumpet, where the Star fallen from heaven, who lets out upon the world the curse of Islam, is Satan, deprived of his place of authority in the Roman world *in consequence of that defeat.*[3]

In this, the third allusion to it, the war in heaven is described from the point of view of

[1] Rev. xi. 2, 3. [2] Rev. vi. [3] Rev. ix.

unseen powers, and in connection with Satan's disguises, and with the history of the Jewish people.

The details are in agreement with this explanation of the whole. Michael and his angels are the Christians, led by the Spirit of God. The Dragon and his angels are the Pagans and their leader, who is also unseen. The completeness of the victory is vividly expressed. The Dragon's authority is destroyed. Historians have expressed astonishment at the swift and final "ruin of the Pagan Religion," as a fact unique in history.

There is rejoicing in heaven over the Dragon's defeat, but the men of earth are warned that Satan is still among them, and that he is more actively hostile than ever.

He first turns upon the Woman in revenge, for she brought forth his enemy. The sufferings of the Jews, throughout the Christian centuries, are thus explained: Satan inspired them. A *flood of water* from the Dragon's mouth is directed against them, to destroy them, but the *earth* swallows up the flood, and saves them from destruction. Water in motion is a natural symbol for destroying armies, and the reference may be to the massacres of Jews with which the armies of Crusaders began their activities; or, more generally, to all the many instances of violence against them. These acts of violence have always been stopped, and the Jews protected, by the general principles of law and order in civilised states. This is perhaps what is meant by the words, "*the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.*"

The danger-period of Israel is mentioned twice

—before and after the description of the war in heaven. It is in different forms—three and a half times, and twelve hundred and sixty days —but it is the same period. It did not begin, properly speaking, till after the victory of Christianity, and though the Reformers did not love the Jews, their national danger was ended by the Reformation. Their desert-wanderings of earlier days were under the *eagle-wings* of God's protection.[1] Their wanderings in the "wilderness of the peoples," here described, were under the same protection, *two wings of a great eagle.*

Meanwhile the Dragon has been cast out, and in that particular form Satan is overthrown. But he can give the Dragon's power, and throne, and authority, to another agent—the Beast of the following chapter;[2] and at a later time, he can take part in the gathering to the war of Armageddon of the enemies of God.[3]

Thus the twelfth chapter describes, in rapid outline, the first centuries of Christianity, with special reference to the destinies of Israel. The Paganism of the Roman Empire, which so well served Satan's purposes against Christ, is seen at last defeated and cast out: but the world is warned that Satan's malice has only been thereby increased.

The last verse of the chapter describes him as still angry with the Woman, Israel, and as going away, after his defeat, "to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."

[1] Deut. xxxii. 11: Exod. xix. 4.

[2] Rev. xiii. 2: R.V.

[3] Rev. xvi. 13-16.

The words might apply either to those Jews who in their exile cling loyally to Jehovah and to the Old Testament—or to the Christian Church, at whose hands Satan has suffered defeat, and against which he is planning a new disguise ; for "they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." [1]

It matters little which is the true alternative ; for Satan's hostility certainly includes both Jew and Christian, and the meaning of the next chapter is not in any way affected.

The Beast from the Sea. (Rev. xiii.)

The thirteenth chapter introduces no new vision—only a new paragraph. The defeated Dragon *goes away*, and as a consequence there arises from the sea a Wild-Beast, conjured up by the Dragon ; for it has the same characteristic marks—seven heads and ten horns—and it receives from the Dragon his power, and his throne, and great authority.

The symbolism is closely connected with that of the fourth Wild-Beast of Daniel's vision, and of the Beast of the seventeenth chapter. It can be fully interpreted here, because in both those passages the symbolism is explained by an angelic interpreter, and because its fulfilment in history is now complete.

Out of the sea of warring nations, as in Daniel's vision, a new power is seen to arise. It is a revival of Rome's Empire in a new and less forbidding form. The Dragon has been replaced by a Beast : and the identity of the one decides

[1] Gal. iii. 7.

the identity of the other. If the Dragon stands for Pagan Rome, as it does in the preceding chapter, then the Beast must stand for Papal Rome: for the Papacy did, as a matter of history, succeed to the prestige, the seat of power, and the world-dominion of the Roman Empire. The fourth Beast in Daniel's vision includes within its scope the three forms of the same symbol found in the Apocalypse: the Dragon, the Beast of the thirteenth chapter, and the Beast of the seventeenth chapter.

These three forms of the symbol show a progress in time. In the first there are crowns on the *heads*—in the second, on the *horns*—in the third, there are no crowns at all, but a *woman-rider* wields authority. They represent three stages in the history of Roman power, as will be fully explained in connection with the seventeenth chapter.

In the thirteenth chapter the crowns are on the ten horns: and the time of the Wild-Beast's career is thus fixed as the time following the break-up of the Empire into ten kingdoms. In the midst of constant changes, the Romance nations, which throughout the Middle Ages divided between them the area of the old Empire, were never far from ten in number, fulfilling the prediction found in Daniel and in the Apocalypse. To the time covered by the history of those nations, the Papal power belongs.

The Papacy inherited or revived the power of old Rome, but not at once. The accuracy of the symbolism is remarkable. Rome first lost its Dragon-character by adopting Christianity: from that moment the symbol is changed to that of a Wild Beast. From that moment too, the power

began to pass from Emperor to Pope, for the Emperor *went away*, as this prophecy puts it—was *taken out of the way*, as St. Paul's prophecy expresses it[1]—by removing his seat of Empire to an Eastern City, far away, leaving behind him all that Rome stood for, as the mistress of the world. He could not take with him, though he thought to do so, the power and prestige of the imperial city; nor could barbarous nations permanently destroy it, for they had nothing to put in its place. It was left to the Bishop of Rome to build up, on the ruins of the Western Empire, a new power, reviving the old one in a new form; a power ruling from Rome, imperially, though with no crown of empire: the "ghost of old Rome, seated on the grave thereof." This power is the first Beast of the thirteenth chapter.

There was left behind at Rome, when the Emperor moved to the East, a dependent emperor, subject to himself. It was this dependent empire that was conquered by the Barbarians: the last form of Roman imperial rule, described in the seventeenth chapter as the seventh and last head of the Wild Beast,[2] the head which in the thirteenth chapter is seen fatally wounded, by the Barbarian sword.[3] That head did indeed come to an end, and with it the rule of Rome as a secular power: but the Beast was revived, as by a miracle; the deadly wound was healed by the Papacy: the Roman Power passed into the hands of the Pope, who exercised it *by means of the ten kingdoms*, into which the old Empire had become divided. That is why the crowns are no longer, in this chapter, on the heads, but

[1] 2 Thess. ii. 7. [2] Rev. xvii. 10. [3] Rev. xiii. 3.

on the horns. The ten kings were indeed crowned, but only by the Pope, and as subject to him.

The destruction and revival of the Roman power, above described, is important enough to be three times referred to in this chapter. It gave to that power the character of being the one permanent thing on earth; a power that could survive the wreck of Empires. It caused men to wonder after the Beast, and to be fascinated by it, in the Middle Ages. It is doing the same thing to-day, and drawing men into the Church of Rome, from other Churches.

But it is important to note, that the Church of Rome, as such, has no place in this chapter. The power described is a World-power, whether wielded by an Emperor or by a Pope. The vision deals with what may be called the Empire of the Papacy. When the Church of Rome enters into the prophecy, it is under the proper Church-symbol, that of a Woman (Rev. xvii.).

If the condemnation of the Roman Church is *then* severe, the judgment was deserved, for the time referred to in that prophecy is the time of the Reformation. The Roman Church was then in active hostility against God's truth and God's people, besides being itself unspeakably corrupt. Apart from that hostility and corruption, the Church of Rome remains, with all its errors, a part of the Christian Church, no more perfect than the rest.

The Beast, *as here seen* in vision, is described in the first three verses. After that, it is not further described, but its acts and changes of character are reported.

As seen, the Beast is *Roman*, in having ten

horns; but *Greek* in appearance, for it is like a leopard, the symbol of the Greek Empire[1]; and *Eastern* in character, for it has the marks of a lion, suggesting Babylon, and a bear, suggesting Medo-Persia.[2] It has lost its imperial power, for the crowns are on the ten horns, and not upon the seven heads.

The accuracy of this symbolism is remarkable. The twelfth chapter has just described the defeat of the Dragon—that is, the victory of Christianity in the days of Constantine. That victory led at once to the removal of the seat of Empire to Constantinople. The Roman Empire became Greek in appearance, and adopted Eastern manners in its court. It became a revival of the old empire of Alexander the Great, *the third* of Daniel's empires.

It was in this form when the Trumpets were sounded. It was in this form when the power that ruled from Rome was destroyed by the Barbarians, and gradually revived by the Papacy. That death and revival are here described in the words, "I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death, and his deadly wound was healed."

From the time of the removal of the seat of empire, the power ruling from Rome ceased to be really imperial, though still known as the Western Empire. It was not even independent. The countries which went to make up its territory became strong, and in little more than a century they took its place. The crowns were then on the *ten horns*, not on the seven heads.

Thus in the first three verses of this chapter,

[1] Dan. vii. 6. [2] Dan. vii. 4, 5.

the condition of the power ruling from Rome is exactly described, as it was in the centuries which immediately followed the victory of the twelfth chapter, and saw the fall of the Western Empire of Rome, and the rise of the Papal power in its place.

The next five verses describe the rise and character of that power.

It is founded upon the prestige of old Rome, which could survive apparent destruction. "All the world wondered after the Beast," because of its permanence.

It has a boastful tongue and blasphemous claims: claiming a divine commission, and divine attributes. The Pope claimed to be the Vicar of Christ on earth, and to have power in heaven, earth, and hell; and the Roman Church accepted these claims.

It blasphemes God's name, and tabernacle, and those "that tabernacle in heaven": by misrepresenting the true character of God, of His Church, and of His servants. In the long series of Papal Bulls which fulfil this prophecy, it is enough to refer to one, by way of illustration: the Bull, "In Caena Domini," which is read publicly every year, in condemnation of every belief not Roman, and every person not in communion with the Papal Church.

It makes war with the saints, and overcomes them; a prediction fulfilled in the long struggle of the Reformation, with its martyrdoms, crusades, and massacres, and its final result—the victory of the Papacy in more than half of Christendom.

Its power is limited to *forty-two months;* the symbolic period of three and half years, which is

never so described, because it is a *symbol*, though it is mentioned seven times. It is the time during which the witnesses prophesy in sackcloth; the time of Israel's special need of protection; the time of the tyranny of the "Little Horn."[1] Its meaning, with that of other time-symbols, is the subject of a special note.[2]

It need only be said here, that the artificial year of 360 days, which is evidently used in this case,[3] is not suitable for the *literal* measurement of historical periods, but is convenient for use as a *symbol*, in which *a day represents a year.* This symbolism is quite definitely used by God, prophetically in the case of Ezekiel and Daniel, and nationally in the case of Israel: and is illustrated in the story of Jacob.

There is, in conclusion, a word of warning and of comfort. Of warning, in the phrase; *If any man hath an ear let him hear;* that is to say, this is a matter which concerns all thinking people. The words are nowhere used except by Christ, Who is Himself the true Author of the Apocalypse. Of comfort, in words addressed to those who suffer persecution: *He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity*; *he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of saints.* That is to say, those who persecute the true followers of Christ will suffer the penalty of their violence in their own persons; God is the Judge; His people must have faith and patience.

[1] Dan. vii. 25. [2] Note G.

[3] Only so could $3\frac{1}{2}$ years = 42 months = 1260 days.

The Beast from the Earth. (Rev. xiii. 11—17.)

Earth and sea are often used as contrasted symbols. In such a case the *earth* may represent a condition of settled government, or the ruling classes which maintain that condition; while the *sea* may stand for unsettled conditions of society, or for the common people.

The first Beast rises out of the sea, which well symbolises the unsettled times during which the Papal power developed. The second Beast, now to be considered, comes up out of the earth. Its origin is connected with times of settled government, and with the rulers rather than with the people.

The symbol is unlike any other in prophecy. It has *two horns like a lamb*; and it is the lamb-like appearance, rather than the number of horns, that seems to be here emphasized. This appearance is in sharp contrast with the voice, which is like that of a Dragon, false and violent.

It exercises all the power of the first Wild-Beast before it,—that is, in its sight. It is, in fact, the supporter of the first Wild-Beast, and exists only to support it. It is referred to in a later chapter as the False Prophet, companion to the Beast.[1]

It is successful, and shows spiritual power. That would seem to be the meaning of its "miracles" and "fire from heaven," which deceive men into worshipping the Beast.

It causes men to make an image of, or in honour of, the Beast; and to make it an effective instrument for edicts and for persecutions; this seems to be the meaning of the image

[1] Rev. xvi. 13.

speaking, and causing the death of those who refuse to worship it.

It establishes a boycott, which may be understood of things secular or things religious, against all who oppose the Beast.

The above is a summary of the prophecy, which has seldom been interpreted, though it is so full of detail. There has been little agreement among those who have attempted its interpretation.

The chief points, by which the interpretation of the symbol must be guided, are (1) that it must be a power which claims some special connection with Christ, the Lamb, and yet teaches things contrary to His truth; (2) that it must exist for the sole purpose of promoting the interests of the Papacy; (3) that it must show spiritual power, and a success which compels admiration and attention; and (4) that it leads men to make some agent or instrument, which becomes in its hands effective in promoting Papal power, both by way of utterance and by way of persecution.

Now the worship of the Beast from the sea is evidently the same thing as the acceptance of the Papal claims, which give the Pope a divine authority. These claims were in great danger at the time of the Reformation. The Christian world had rebelled against them. To save the Papacy, "the Society of Jesus" was founded,—that is, the Jesuit Order,—taking the very name of Christ, but giving up the highest principles of Christianity, truth and love, to serve its purpose. Truth was sacrificed to expediency; love to the narrow and bitter principles of religious persecution.

The Jesuits thus saved the Papacy in the sixteenth century, and they have exercised its power, in its sight, ever since. They have shown great devotion to their object; their success has been wonderful, and it has been promoted and maintained to a large extent by a true devotion, spiritual in character, but wrongly directed, and quite unscrupulous. They have laboured continually, not so much for the glory of God, as for the dominance of an earthly church.

The Jesuits are thus seen to fulfil the first three conditions suggested by the prophecy. They also fulfil the fourth.

Rome's answer to the Reformation was the Council of Trent, which was managed by the Jesuits, and passed the decrees which they dictated. It has been said that Papal doctrine "was then completely articulated for the first time." The decrees of the Council have been Rome's test of orthodoxy ever since; effective agents in the hands of the Jesuits and the Inquisition. In them, as it would seem, we have the *image*, made at the suggestion of the second Beast, and by it made effective for the utterance of doctrine and the persecution of opponents of the Papacy.

The second Beast, like the first, is religious in appearance, political in reality; like the first, it is an organisation made up of laity and clergy of every grade; and it claims to be not only a faithful upholder of the Papacy, but a close imitation of the Papal organisation.

The Jesuit Order is unlike any other religious order: the other orders are jealous of its power. Its members are not shut up, but enter actively into worldly affairs. They are still active, and still keep the same object steadily in view, the

extension of the Papal power in the world. They had much to do with the Vatican Council of A.D. 1870, which decreed the infallibility of the Pope.

Thus the thirteenth chapter of the Apocalypse is a prediction of the two ruling powers which, taken together, have had the greatest influence on the destinies of the Christian Church, in past centuries :—the Papacy, and the Jesuits.

The identity of the former is made quite clear by the details which are given. It is first described in its beginnings, as the heir to the power of old Rome, when that power seemed to have been wholly destroyed by the Barbarians : and then a sketch is given of its later career ; a reign of "forty-two months," supported by blasphemous claims widely acknowledged, and upheld by cruelty and persecution. One need scarcely be a Protestant to realise that this is a true description of the Papal power. It was a Roman Catholic synod that branded certain Popes as "monsters of iniquity" : the title-deeds of Papal ascendancy are now known to be deliberate forgeries : and the history of the Reformation is full of examples of persecution and massacre for the benefit of the Papal cause.

It is important to notice that the first Beast, the Beast from the sea, is not the Church of Rome, but the Papal power : a world-power which, though unlike other world-powers,[1] is to be classed with them, and is therefore represented, as they are, by a Wild-beast symbol.

The Beast *as seen and described* in the thirteenth chapter[2] is in its earlier form : that is,

[1] Dan. vii. 24. [2] Verses 1-4.

in a state of transition from the latest form of Roman imperial rule—which was really Greek, though it still included Italy and the West—to the earliest form of Papal rule, which was a revival of Roman imperial power, wielded by an autocratic Pope.

The same power *as seen and described* in the seventeenth chapter[1] is in a later stage of development, and is represented by a double symbol, a Beast and a Woman. The *secular* power is thus shown to be wielded by *Church* authority: the autocratic ruler has become the figure-head of a powerful system. A woman-rider, the Roman Church, is in absolute control of a headless Beast, for the last of the seven heads has lost its power,[2] and no crowns are left.[3] The Woman has become responsible for the crimes committed by the Beast, and so occupies the chief place in the vision.

These considerations will occur again in their proper place, in connection with the seventeenth chapter.

The career of the first Beast is followed, in the thirteenth chapter, only so far as the hour of its success, and of its triumph over the saints.[4] Then the second Beast is introduced. This corresponds with the fulfilment. The Jesuit Order was founded at the time when the Papal power was at its greatest, and was entering on a campaign of persecution to maintain its position.

The identity of the first Beast establishes that of the second: for the Jesuits undoubtedly came to the help of the Papacy, and saved it, when

[1] Rev. xvii. 8. [2] Rev. xvii. 10, 11.
[3] Rev. xvii. 3. [4] Verses 5-10.

the Reformation threatened it with destruction: and they have, as certainly, wielded the power of the Papacy ever since.

The only questions that remain open are connected with the *Image of the Beast*, and its *power to tyrannise* over the world.[1]

This part of the prophecy is so unlike anything else in the Bible, that it is not easy to decide the *degree of literality* to be looked for in its interpretation. It may have been fulfilled in connection with the Council of Trent, as suggested above; or it may have some more literal fulfilment in the future.

The preceding section, relating to the first Beast, appears to go no further than the Reformation. The section that follows has also the Reformation period for its subject. But it remains possible that the career of the second Beast is followed to a later period: that the Image is not yet made, the tyranny not yet set up. History, the great interpreter of prophecy, can alone decide.

This uncertainty, however, does not affect in any way the interpretation of the rest of the Book. It simply makes possible a future development of evil, not otherwise described, in connection with the outbreak under the sixth Vial: an outbreak which bands together the forces of a hostile world, for destruction at the appearance of the returning King.

The Number of the Beast. (Rev. xiii. 18.)

The last verse of the chapter is a help and a challenge. The number of the Beast is a

[1] Verses 13-17.

number corresponding to a name. As the Greeks always used the letters of the alphabet in place of numbers, by giving a numerical value to each letter, the association of a name with a number was perfectly natural to the Greek mind.

The word required must be a Greek word, for Greek is the language of this Book. It must be a word characteristic of the Beast from the sea. Its letters, taken at their Greek values and added together, must make six hundred and sixty-six.

Countless suggestions have been made of words considered suitable; but one of the two suggestions first put on record remains the best. Irenæus, in the second century, suggested the Greek equivalent of our word *Latin*,[1] as the word intended, on the ground that the Latins were then in power. The suggestion satisfies the requirements of the case more completely than Irenæus imagined, for he lived before the prophecy began to be fulfilled. The Papacy has been at all times, and in all things, Latin in its character. The Papal Church uses the Latin language in its services and in its edicts to this day.

The Company on Mount Sion. (Rev. xiv. 1-5.)

The last of the three parenthetical chapters seems to deal with the confused times of the Reformation. The twelfth chapter drew a symbolic picture of the strong power of Pagan Rome: the thirteenth, of the tyranny of Papal Rome and its faithful ally. In the fourteenth chapter no such power is prominent. It is filled

[1] Λατεῖνος: Lateinos.

with heavenly voices and earthly conflicts, aptly symbolising the confused condition of the Reformation period. The struggle of freedom against tyranny in religious matters involved a century and a half of what may almost be described as civil war—the worst kind of warfare—and along with it such cruel and widespread persecution of Protestants as to throw into the shade the persecutions suffered by Christians under the Roman emperors. The numbers of those who suffered are certainly to be reckoned by millions, if the wars of religion are included.

The chapter opens with an obvious allusion to the Sealing Vision of the seventh chapter. Though the individuals here are not the same as those there sealed, the company of 144,000, seen with the Lamb on Mount Sion, with the seal of God in their foreheads, must of course refer to the same people, that is, to the stock of Israel, preserved by that seal from national destruction. Sealed in that chapter, before the tempest of Barbarians broke upon the Empire and destroyed it, they are seen here safe, after eleven centuries of danger and persecution. The seal of God is sure.

They are seen with the Lamb, whom they follow, on Mount Sion. They are marked with high moral qualities, and with the freedom from idolatry of which virginity is often a Scripture figure.[1] There is no suggestion of faith in Christ: they are only said to be following Him, and to be "purchased," as firstfruits from the earth. The voice, the harpers, and the song which is reserved for these sealed ones, are in heaven,

[1] *e.g.* Isaiah i. 21.

while the sealed ones themselves are on earth: and the passage seems to suggest that they cannot learn the song till they reach heaven.

It is the same with the twenty-four Elders, who are Old Testament saints, and only learn their *new song*—the song of redemption by Christ—when in the presence of God they realise the true cause of their salvation, the slain Lamb.[1] The conditions in the two cases are not quite the same, but they bring about the same result. Both the Elders and the 144,000 seen on Mount Sion are saved by Christ, but not through a conscious or personal faith in Him.

As a matter of history, the Jews at the outbreak of the Reformation, were not only numerous, but were morally in advance of the Christian Church, and free from its idolatry. The years which immediately preceded the Reformation in Germany, were occupied with a widespread agitation, associated with the name of Reuchlin, in favour of the Jews, their morals, and their Scriptures. As a result, they were fully vindicated against their enemies the Dominican friars.[2] They were "following the Lamb" more closely in their lives than the Christian Church of that day was doing. No difficulty is to be found in the statement that they were purchased as firstfruits from the earth. If Christ can save the men of Old Testament times, who never heard His name, so also can He save those who, in the midst of a corrupt

[1] Rev. v. 8, 9.

[2] This is recognised by Ranke as *a first victory for the new principles:* it roused all Germany. See Note L: and Barham's *Life of John Reuchlin.*

Christianity that misrepresented Him, remained free from idolatry, were proud of their Law and of their God, and set an example of morality to the Christians around them. They would one day, like the Elders, learn in heaven a new song, reserved for them alone—a song of praise for salvation by a Messiah whom on earth they had failed to recognise.

Such an interpretation is a reasonable one, in view of the vision of the seventh chapter. No other satisfactory explanation of the passage has been suggested. It should be noted that in the fifth verse the words "before the throne of God" should properly be omitted, as in the Revised Version. The company consists of *blameless*, not of *perfect* people.

The Gospel republished. (Rev. xiv. 6, 7.)

Three angelic proclamations follow. In the first, the sealed few of Israel are put into immediate contrast, as in the seventh chapter, with the countless multitudes, of all nations, for whom the Gospel is intended. Once again, as a result of the Reformation, the Gospel is to go forth as it did in earlier days, with something of its first purity and power. This is the message of the first angel. It is a message which begins, as true gospel-preaching must always begin, with repentance towards God. The Reformation has in this been much misunderstood. Luther's spiritual experience, which was deep and true, was representative of the movement in which he was the chief figure.[1]

[1] Ranke, *Hist. of Ref. in Germany*, pp. 144-47.

The New Testament made men feel their need: the Church, which had drifted far from the teaching of the New Testament, failed to satisfy it: the lives of the clergy were a scandal. And when the head of the Church began publicly to sell for money the pardon which the soul realised it could only get from God, a few burning words from Luther's pen were enough to rouse the reforming spirit into full activity. It was the fear of God, newly aroused in their minds, which took from the men of that day the superstitious fear of "the Church," which had held them so long.

"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," was the first message in Gospel times.[1] "Fear God, and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment is come," was the first message to the Christian world, when the printing-press re-published the Gospel in the days of the Reformation.

Babylon's Fall proclaimed. (Rev. xiv. 8.)

A second angel announces the fall of Babylon. This is the first mention of Babylon in the Apocalypse. It appears again as the subject of the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters. It would seem, from those chapters, to be a figure of the Papal Church in the days of its greatest power, and greatest corruption, that is, in the condition which provoked the Reformation. The fall of Babylon here spoken of is only a foretaste of the great event itself: a fulfilment on a small scale, given as a sign,[2] for the encouragement of reform.

[1] Matt. iii. 2: iv. 17: Acts ii. 38.

[2] As in the case of the Transfiguration, which was only an *earnest* of "the Kingdom of God coming in power." (Mark ix. 1-4.)

Luther's Theses gave the signal for the Reformation in A.D. 1517. Only ten years afterwards, in A.D. 1527, an army consisting of Spaniards, Italians, and Germans, took the city of Rome, and for nine months sacked the city and insulted the Pope. The event was a political incident, quite unconnected with the Reformers: but the men who took part in it were Protestants, who in wild fanaticism found a keen satisfaction in the humiliation of the Pope, and the long sack of the Papal city. Historians have described this sack of Rome as without parallel.[1] Its importance consists in the fact, that by the men of that day it was regarded as a severe blow to the great prestige which the Papacy had till then enjoyed, and as a foretaste and pledge of the final success of the Protestant cause.

More need not be said here about the Babylon of the Apocalypse, which will be fully dealt with in connection with later chapters.

A Warning against the Beast. (Rev. xiv. 9-12.)

A third angel follows with a solemn warning, which is at the same time an encouragement. The Papacy had prepared the torture and the stake for all who separated from the Church of Rome at the bidding of conscience. It was a prospect which might well shake the faith of God's servants. But God here declares in answer, that there are tortures worse, and more enduring, than any Rome can inflict, and that these are reserved for His enemies. The enmity of the Beast will severely test the patience and faith of

[1] *Decline and Fall*, chap. xxxi. Ranke, *Hist. of Ref. in Germany*, p. 443-445. Robertson's *Charles V.*, Book iv.

God's true servants, but they will in the end be fully vindicated.

A special Proclamation of Blessing. (Rev. xiv. 13.)

A voice from heaven confirms and completes this message of encouragement. Is a martyr branded with the name of heretic, and called upon to die outside the Church's pale? Blessed then *from henceforth* are those who die in the Lord, whether they are accounted in the Church or not. Rest is their portion now, and their faith and sufferings will be rewarded hereafter. The message has a note of time attached: *from henceforth.* It was new, and was needed, at the time of the Reformation.

The Harvest and the Vintage. (Rev. xiv. 14-20.)

One closing section of this wonderful epitome of Reformation matters remains to be considered. It is usually treated as if it had no connection whatever with its surroundings, which are, as a matter of fact, the best clue to its meaning. It is one of the most obscure passages in the Apocalypse.

Seated on a cloud, suggestive of divine authority, a figure is seen, like a son of man, wearing a golden crown of victory, and holding a sharp sickle. It is Christ, not indeed coming as yet in person—for He only "casts in" His sickle[1]—

[1] "Send forth thy sickle, and reap: for the hour to reap is come; for the harvest of the earth is over-ripe. And he that sat on the cloud cast his sickle upon the earth; and the earth was reaped." (R.V.) The passage recalls Joel iii. 13. The harvest and the vintage seem to be *contrasted*: compare Matt. xiii. 30.

but gathering out of the fires of martyrdom, and from the field of battle, the true souls who are wheat for His garner ; no small proportion, perhaps, of those done to death in the struggle with the Papal tyranny. The " harvest of the earth " would here seem to have that meaning.

There follows at once the vintage, which concerns only those who have earned the wrath of God by fighting against Him. It is brought about by the agency of the angel who has power over fire. Fire is often a symbol for spiritual activity, whether good or bad : enthusiasm or fanaticism. The fanatical fury, which inspired the wars of the Reformation, seems here in view. It was not only God's true servants, or only Protestants, who died in battle, on land and sea, in the wars of the Reformation. Of those who died, God knew who were His, and who were holy ; and those who were His enemies are here, as it would seem, separately described as the vintage of the earth, reserved for the wrath of God.

The winepress is trodden without the city. These enemies not only have no part in the City of God, but their punishment will not disturb its peace, or defile its streets. Even the turmoil of the Reformation period is not to be allowed to disturb the secret growth of the City of God, the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth. With God there is no confusion, no mistake.

The last verse of the chapter is very difficult, and is generally left unexplained. But in the belief that it refers to events now past, the following suggestion is offered as to its meaning.

Blood is the symbol of *war :* horses are *war-horses :* the bridles which control their move-

ments suggest a *checking* of their activity, for the blood reaches to the bridles. A *furlong*, as the common measure of length may well stand for a *year*, the common measure of time: as do days, cows, and ears of corn, in other passages.

Sixteen hundred years would pass, from the time of the vision, before wars of religion would cease in Christendom.

The vision was given, as early writers agree, about A.D. 95 or 96: and the Peace of Ryswick, which marks the final settlement of the Reformation, was signed in A.D. 1697. There have been no Christian wars of religion since.[1]

Whether this is the true explanation or not, the years which saw the signing of the Peace of Ryswick, and the Treaty of Carlowitz (which followed as its immediate sequel) were of extraordinary importance in the political history of the Christian religion.

While the one treaty put an end to the wars of religion in the West, between Catholics and Protestants, the other put an end to the wars of religion in the East, between Christians and Moslems.

The Ottoman Turks had been a danger to Christianity for six centuries. They had exhausted Europe by provoking the Crusades, had

[1] The Peace of Ryswick was for England "the close of a long and obstinate struggle and the opening of a new era of political history. It was the final and decisive defeat of the conspiracy.....to turn England into a Roman Catholic country and into a dependency of France. But it was even more than this. It was the definite establishment of England as the centre of European resistance against all attempts to overthrow the balance of power." (J. R. Green, *Hist. of the Eng. People.*) The nations of Europe were no longer grouped as Roman Catholic and Protestant, as champions of religious parties.

destroyed the Christian Empire of the East, and had carried the war far into Europe itself. But their aggression, as champions of the Moslem creed, ceased with the Treaty of Carlowitz. Henceforward they were only, in war and peace, one of the group of European powers.

The coincidence of the political establishment of Protestantism in the West, with the end of the Moslem menace from the East, is remarkable for another reason.

In the early days of the Reformation, when Protestantism was weak and divided, the forces controlled by the Papacy, which might easily have crushed the movement, were kept fully occupied in repelling the Turks, who were then at the height of their power. During the whole period of the Reformation struggle, the Turks, by their activity, created a diversion in favour of the Protestants: and at the very moment of the establishment of Protestantism, their aggressive hostility came to an end.

Those who value the religious liberty secured by the Reformation may be excused if they find in this something more than a mere coincidence. It looks like a providential arrangement: and adds probability to the interpretation which has been suggested for the last verse of the fourteenth chapter of the Apocalypse.

There is nothing unreasonable in the expectation that the passage should be understood. Its position in the Apocalypse, as part of a section attached to the sixth Trumpet, suggests that it refers to events now past; and it ends without any hint of a final catastrophe. The Book is a Revelation or *unveiling* of things future at the time it was given: its contents were not sealed,

like Daniel's last vision, for some later age. The events of earthly history are not for us to know before they happen, even through the study of prophecy; but when a prophecy has been fulfilled, we may expect to recognise its fulfilment, —as in the case of the disciples and Christ's resurrection,—for the confirmation of our faith and hope (John xx. 9).

The Thread of Vision resumed. (Rev. xv.)

The crisis of the Reformation is over, the harvest reaped, the vintage pressed out. There follows a chorus of praise in heaven, from those who have overcome the Beast. They stand on a sea of glass, before the throne. God's purposes, so mysterious to them while they were suffering on earth, are now fully understood: there is nothing to obscure their spiritual vision. They praise God that He has made His power felt among the nations of the earth, and has begun to put down the Papal usurper of His authority.

But before this praise is heard, seven angels are seen in heaven, the agents of God's seven last plagues upon the earth. The praise is not connected with them, but with what went before. This glimpse of the vial angels, seen before the song of praise, would seem to be given for the express purpose of forming a link of continuity in the chain of visions, and so binding the seven Vials to the seventh Trumpet. For in the verses that follow, the statement is made, in the same words which occur in the eleventh chapter, that the Temple,—properly speaking, the sanctuary or inner part of the temple,—is opened in heaven. That was the only definite result of the sounding

of the seventh Trumpet:[1] and the connection makes it clear that the seven Vials are the contents of the seventh Trumpet-vision.

The Reformation period belongs to the sixth Trumpet, and is the subject of the tenth and eleventh chapters of the Apocalypse. Its end, and the new conditions which it introduced, are to be found in the first result of the sounding of the seventh Trumpet,—the sanctuary seen open in heaven, but as yet unapproachable.

Out of the sanctuary come the Vial-angels, to send plagues upon the earth. That is to say, the Reformation has proclaimed to all the world the Gospel of free grace, and by their treatment of that Gospel, now known to all, men are henceforth to be judged. The Vials of the wrath of God are connected in the Vision with the four Living Creatures, representatives of Nature. The suggestion is that they are *natural consequences* of unbelief, rather than punishments inflicted from heaven.

Whether this is so or not, in the prophecy, it is certainly true of the fulfilment. The two great outbreaks of evil which mark the Vial period both originated in definite Apostasy from the Christian faith: in the first case by France, in the second, by Germany. The penalty in each case has taken the form of European war.

The Vial-period, the third and last in Christian history, dates in fact from the French Revolution. It is marked by the gradual decay of the political importance of the Christian Church, by the rise of avowed infidelity, and by the terrible consequences which infidelity brings

[1] Rev. xi. 15-19.

upon Christendom and the world. These consequences are described as the *seven last plagues.*

The period has included intense activity for good on the part of Christian people, a faithful minority, with results which have influenced the most distant parts of the world, and have proved that the Gospel has not lost its power. But it has also included the French Revolution, with its infidelity, its fearful atrocities, and the European wars which were one of its consequences. It has included also the outbreak of the great war, in A.D. 1914.

Those writers who do not consider the French Revolution and its consequences a scourge serious enough to be described in prophecy as introducing the Vial-period, have underrated the facts. As a result of a generation of infidel teaching, hell broke loose in France, and Europe was for years a battlefield, though England remained secure.

To-day, history is repeating itself in even darker colours. As a result of a generation of teaching hostile to Christian principles—this time in Germany—hell has again broken loose in Christendom. The war that is being waged was anticipated, but no anticipation approached the reality. It is as yet only a beginning, and none can see the end.

The origin of the war, in definite religious apostasy on the part of Germany: its wide scope, involving already the manhood of six of the great Powers of Europe: its record of atrocities on land and sea, perpetrated as part of a settled policy: the spirit of hatred which has been invoked by authority and has entered into the life of a whole nation: and the extension of the

horrors of war by every means which science has put into men's hands :—these things are already bad enough to remove the last trace of objection to the belief that the present time is within the Vial-period of prophecy.

It is important to notice, that in the case of both the outbreaks that mark the period, war has only followed apostasy as an indirect consequence. Its terrors and sufferings may be regarded as plagues let loose upon an unbelieving world, to bring it back to God.

The Seven Vials. (Rev. xvi.)

The seven Vials of God's wrath carry the prophecy to the end of this dispensation ; that is, to the Lord's return.

They fall more particularly upon the countries associated with the Papacy and its persecutions; except the sixth, which has to do with the Eastern Apostasy, Mohammedanism ; and the seventh, which brings in the end. It is possible to see the sequence of cause and effect, in some particulars, connecting the crime with its punishment. The massacre of St. Bartholomew, and the expulsion of the best citizens of France as being Huguenots, were among the causes of the French Revolution: for they removed from France those who would have been as salt in the midst of corruption, not only to restrain the people from infidelity, but also to check the faults in high places which provoked the outbreak.

When it came, it brought a terrible penalty, for France, and for Roman Christendom : and this seems to be the subject of the first four Vials.

They resemble the first four Trumpets, and the first four Seals, in being short and close together. The interpretation here given limits them to a period of twenty-five years, which is in keeping with the shortness of the passage describing them.

There is another connection between the first four Vials and the first four Trumpets. The same symbolic objects are affected in each case: that is to say, the earth, the sea, the rivers, and the sun. This connection is more formal than real, for the effects produced on the objects do not correspond, and in the case of the fourth are exactly opposite. The sun is in the one case darkened by eclipse, and the other, given greater power.

The First Vial. (Rev. xvi. 2.)

The first Vial is poured upon the earth: that is, upon the ruling powers, the settled government. As a result, a noisome and grievous sore falls upon the supporters of the Beast: that is, upon those who support the Papal power.

History is the best interpreter of the details of prophecy: and the history of the French Revolution gives here all the help that is needed. The years that preceded it were marked by the spread of infidel and revolutionary doctrines, through the writings of a group of men, of whom Rousseau and Voltaire are the best remembered. The figure used in the prophecy, of poison in the blood, breaking out into a noisome sore, corresponds exactly with the condition of France in those days.

The dangerous principles advocated were to a

large extent weapons forged by Papal Rome in earlier days, and now turned against herself. It was Rome that had first taught that the people had the right to murder or depose rulers who were of another creed than their own: that it was right to destroy Protestants, to close their churches, to confiscate their property. The men of the Revolution applied these doctrines, but being infidels they applied them to the Papists; and when they fell out amongst themselves, they applied the same principles of violence to one another.

The result was a sudden outburst of revolutionary fury, which fell upon the ruling classes of France, where the Papacy had long been supreme. It swept away the whole fabric of government, and killed or exiled those who had maintained it. The King and Queen were guillotined. Thousands of priests were massacred. The Christian religion was proscribed and insulted. The common people saw in these acts of violence and folly only the path to a new-found liberty, and rejoiced accordingly.

Thus the first Vial gives in a few words a vivid picture of the first stage in the French Revolution; the people of the most Papal country in Europe, breaking out in mad revolutionary fury, and raging against all authority, human and divine.

The Second Vial. (Rev. xvi. 3.)

The second Vial is poured out into the sea, and it becomes like the blood of a dead man, and every living thing dies that is in the sea.

There is nothing to show whether the sea is here

meant literally, or as a figure. In the case of the second Trumpet, it appears to be used in its literal sense, although it is in the midst of symbolism, for mention is made of the destruction of ships. In the present case, the question is open : but it is found that the second Vial has in either case proved a true prophecy.

If the sea is taken as a symbol, it is in contrast with the earth, which suffers under the first Vial, and stands for the aristocracy or ruling classes. The sea will thus represent the unorganised masses of the people and the Vial will describe the effect upon them of the removal (under the first Vial) of all the restraints of government and of religion.

The facts are well known. The people of France, who had risen against a real tyranny, religious as well as political, had ended by becoming criminals, murdering without pity, destroyers of all who represented authority of any kind. Their punishment came, when they began to murder one another. The reign of terror swept away thousands, many of them leaders of the Revolution. The revolts in La Vendée and elsewhere were only put down with fearful cruelty. The country found itself not only without rulers, and without religion, but without any principle of healthy life ; a national condition well described as like the blood of a dead man.

If on the other hand the sea be taken here in its literal sense, as it is in the case of the second Trumpet, the prophecy has equally been fulfilled. Naval war followed as a very early consequence of the French Revolution. But the French navy never had a chance against the navy of

England, and it was swept from the seas, with that of Spain, by Nelson and his captains. They were God's agents, to that extent, for the punishment of the Papal nations. So far as those nations were concerned, every living soul died that was in the sea.

Thns the second Vial describes the second stage or consequence of Revolution in France: perhaps referring particularly to naval warfare, but more probably to the complete demoralisation of the French people; which led, through warfare and atrocities at home, to the war against the rest of Christendom, which is the subject of the next Vial.

The Third Vial. (Rev. xvi. 4-7.)

The third Vial is poured into the rivers and springs, and they become blood. There are voices, one from the Angel of the waters, and one from the altar itself, praising the justice of God in thus punishing murderers.

In prophecy, rivers and springs may stand for armies in motion, especially when connected, as here, with blood, the symbol of war.

The third stage of the Revolution was a condition of war: not in France only, but all over Europe. France had to defend itself against foreign armies coming to avenge its crimes. The war thus begun was to continue, more or less, for twenty-five years. It extended to almost every country in Europe, and ended only when it had drained the strength of France, and had terribly punished the nations which had most of all taken part in the persecution of Protestants.

This third Vial has a wider scope than the first two, and it is the subject of special utterances. The angel of the waters, as representing war; the altar as representing slain martyrs;—praise the justice of God in punishing cruel persecutors, and in doing so by means of war, their own chosen weapon against their fellow-Christians in an earlier generation.

The blood of the martyrs of a former persecution cried out for vengeance from the foot of the altar, where the blood was poured out—under the fifth Seal.[1]

Thus the third Vial describes the third stage or consequence of Revolution: war, not only in France, but in the greater part of Roman Christendom.

The Fourth Vial. (Rev. xvi. 8, 9.)

The fourth Vial is poured upon the sun, and its effect is to give it greater power to scorch mankind.

The sun here, as elsewhere, stands for the central authority: in this case, the Emperor Napoleon: not personally as a kind of Antichrist, but merely as God's scourge. France had destroyed its government utterly, in its pursuit of liberty, but it was only to fall under the power of a Dictator. Napoleon exercised absolute authority not only over France, but over a large part of the Roman world. He entered as a conqueror most of the capitals of Europe, and imposed his own terms on the conquered countries.

[1] Rev. vi. 9-11.

Wherever his authority extended, he set up a military despotism which left no liberty to public opinion or to the press; he contemptuously suppressed old constitutional forms which had imposed some check on the power of the sovereign; he made all depend absolutely on his personal will; and by means of his secret police, he held the people of the countries over which he ruled in a "net of Government" from which there was no escape.

England owed her security, if prophecy is any guide, as much to her Protestant character as to her insular position. On the continent of Europe, Napoleon was used by God to punish the nations of Papal Christendom. The lesson was not taken to heart. The fall of Napoleon led to the restoration of old abuses, and of corrupt governments. The nations failed to see the hand of God in these plagues, and showed no spirit of repentance.[1]

Thus the first four Vials describe in rapid outline the Revolutionary period, and the great events which, taking their rise in France, completely changed, in those few years, the conditions and the outlook of the whole of Christendom.

The Fifth Vial. (Rev. xvi. 10, 11.)

The fifth Vial is poured out upon the throne of the Beast, with the result that his kingdom is darkened, and his supporters suffer so acutely, that they "gnaw their tongues for pain."

It is not difficult to understand the figures, in view of their surroundings.

[1] Rev. xvi. 9.

The throne of the Beast, as of the Dragon before him, is Rome, the seat of his power. His kingdom represents, not his spiritual authority, but his temporal sovereignty, as ruler of the Papal States, or States of the Church, which included the city of Rome. Only by virtue of these sovereign rights had the Pope any claim to a kingly crown. His kingdom was darkened or eclipsed,—a ruling power being likened to the sun,—when the Temporal Power was abolished. The loss was a very bitter one to the supporters of the Papacy, and their feelings are here expressed by an apt and vivid figure.

The Temporal Power was actually lost for a time as early as the days of Napoleon, but only for a few years. The spoliation of the Papal Church began with the Revolution in France in A.D. 1789, and continued, in various ways, during the years that followed. At first confined to France, it extended, with the Revolution, to Germany and Italy; and in A.D. 1797, the Pope had to save himself and his capital by resigning a large part of the Temporal Power, and paying a million and a half sterling to Napoleon.

In the following year the French troops entered Rome, arrested and insulted the Pope, and carried him as prisoner to France, where he soon after died. His successor suffered many indignities at the hands of Napoleon; he was forced to be present as a spectator when Napoleon crowned himself at Paris; and in A.D. 1809, he was deprived of all the Temporal Power that remained to him, while the city of Rome became a part of the French Empire, and he himself an exile from the Papal city.

These events belong to the first four Vials.

They were followed by the fall of Napoleon in A.D. 1815, and the restoration of the Temporal Power to the Papacy. But the loss of it, even for a time, was a serious blow to the Papal prestige, and an encouragement to opponents. In this respect, it may be compared with the Sack of Rome in A.D. 1527, already referred to.[1]

The Temporal Power was restored for more than fifty years; but during those years, the rise of Germany, the fall of France, and the national revival of Italy, combined to bring about its final abolition, in A.D. 1870, in fulfilment of the prediction of the fifth Vial.

The Pope is now only a spiritual ruler; he does not even rule over the city of Rome, and he has never ceased to protest that he is a prisoner in the Vatican, because his civil authority does not extend beyond its walls.

To the champion of the Papacy to-day, there is no event of which the recollection is more painful than the loss of the Temporal Power,—a loss made more bitter by the fact that no Roman Catholic State raised a finger to prevent it.

The Sixth Vial. (Rev. xvi. 12-16.)

The sixth Vial is poured out upon the great river Euphrates, and its waters are dried up, that the way may be prepared for the "kings from the sunrising."

The prophecy here leaves the West, and turns to Eastern affairs. There has been very wide agreement in the application of the sixth Vial to the Turkish Power. Under the sixth Trumpet,

[1] p. 161.

the Ottoman Turks invaded the Eastern Empire, and pressing gradually westward took its capital, Constantinople, and set up a Moslem Empire in its place. Starting from the Euphrates (by which in that prophecy also they are identified), they spread like a flood over all the countries of Eastern Christendom.[1]

Under the sixth Vial, the flood is to dry up. The Turks are to lose their hold on conquered countries one after another.

The prophecy has already been more than half fulfilled. The first movement took place, as in the case of the fifth Vial, in the days of Napoleon, who in A.D. 1798 took Egypt from Turkey. But, as in that case also, this was only a foretaste; its effect seemed to pass away. Egypt was restored to Turkey; and in the Crimean War England and France fought Russia in order to save the Turkish Empire. That war only delayed the drying up of the flood, which had already begun with the loss of Greece in A.D. 1827. Servia, Moldavia, Wallachia, and other provinces, were lost about the same time; and since then there has been continual shrinkage, until at the present time the Turks control only a small slip of territory in Europe, and none at all in Africa. The time is perhaps not far distant, when Palestine itself shall be liberated from Turkish oppression, and so prepared for the full return of the Jews.

The "kings from the sunrising" may be the rulers of the Yellow Races, China and Japan. No details are given by which to fix the meaning; but the events of recent years have revealed in

[1] Rev. ix. 14.

the Far East, two new world powers, awake after centuries of stagnation, rapidly developing on European lines, and bent on asserting themselves. The future of China and Japan is of extreme importance to the nations of the West. It is particularly remarkable, in view of this prophecy, that *the rising sun* is blazoned on the flag of Japan.

The sixth Vial, so far as it concerns the Ottoman Empire, is not yet wholly fulfilled. The prophecy at this point touches the present, and looks on towards the future.

Attached to the sixth Vial, and forming a part of it, are four verses of immense significance, predicting the war of Armageddon. The fearful outbreak which began in A.D. 1914 has directed the attention of all who believe in the Bible to these verses.

Three evil spirits are seen to go out into the world, to do Satan's work. Their particular purpose is to involve the world in war. They are connected with the Dragon, the Beast, and the Second Beast, or False Prophet.

Before the summer of A.D. 1914, it was quite possible to identify the three evil spirits, by means of their connection with the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet. The difficulty was, to see any way in which their influence was likely to embroil the nations in war. They could be recognised as (1) infidelity, (2) ecclesiastical ambition, (3) the worship of expediency.

To-day the prophecy stands revealed, though the completion of its fulfilment may for a time be delayed. The causes which led to the present war are exactly those indicated. They account for all that the Germans have done:—their long

hostile preparations in time of peace; their false pretext for war; their murderous onslaught on peaceful neighbours; their breach of solemn compacts; and their methods of savagery.

(1) The Germans have abandoned Christianity. It stood in the way of their ambitions. It reproved their covetousness. It taught a "slave-morality" of kindness, contentment, and unselfishness.

For more than a generation the spirit of infidelity has been at work in Germany, and it has demoralised the people. Higher Criticism is German in name and in origin. It begins by rejecting, on *à priori* grounds, all definite inspiration, miracle, and prediction. It has applied to the Bible critical methods which would produce absurd results if applied to any of the classical authors. It has treated Scripture as if it were a dead body handed over for dissection. As a consequence, the German people have gradually lost their faith in a divine and living Christ, and have taken instead a God peculiar to Germany, who is almost a revival of the Pagan god of war.

(2) The influence of the second evil spirit, the ambition of the Papacy to rule the world through the Church, which was the cause of the wars of the Reformation, is seen in the grouping of the powers that are at war. It is a war of Papal and Moslem powers against the world: and it is the Papal powers alone that are really responsible.

Austria is definitely Papal in her allegiance: Germany has been controlled for a generation by the Papal power, for the Papal or Centre party has held during that time the balance of

power, and has allowed no minister to hold office except with its permission.

On the other hand, Russia has always been anti-Papal: England has been so since the Reformation: France, since the passing of the Separation Law: while Italy, placed in a difficulty by the fact that it includes the seat of the Papal power, has yet always been, since its unity was achieved, an anti-Papal State.

Thus two great powers which are under Papal control are at war with four anti-Papal powers: and the fact is significant, for the Papal powers were the aggressors. Belgium, with its Roman Catholic faith, would not have suffered had it proved obedient, and joined the Papal league.

It would seem as if, by means of war, the Papacy was scheming to recover its lost power among the nations.

The alliance with Turkey is a separate matter. It has its own significance, in connection with the fulfilment of prophecy.

(3) The influence of the third evil spirit is seen in the cynical disregard of all pledges given, of all principles of honour and fair play, of all consideration for non-combatants, that have marked the conduct of war by Germany. Nothing can be wrong which helps on Germany's desire to rule the world. Everything is justified by "military necessity." It is the worship of expediency in its most hateful form: a compromise with any crime, so long as it promotes success.

This was the new and dangerous principle which was introduced by the Jesuits into the Christian Church, in the days of the Reformation, to save the Papal power.

It is being adopted on a national scale in the present war, in the attempt to gain for the nations over whom Rome still rules a world-dominion.

The three evil spirits have already drawn half the civilised world into the conflict. The question naturally arises, "Is this the war of Armageddon?"

It is impossible to speak with certainty; but it seems clear from a comparison of prophecy with history that the world has reached its final crisis, whether that be short or long. The seventh Vial alone remains, and that, associated as it is with our Lord's return, may be short, sharp and final.

The verses which describe the war of Armageddon are arranged in a remarkable way. Between the gathering to war and the gathering to Armageddon,—though these are evidently parts of the same crisis,—there comes a warning voice, from behind the scenes, as it were; the voice of the Giver of the Apocalypse, Christ Jesus, "Behold, I come as a thief; blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."

The Lord's coming is nowhere marked with day or hour: but the position of this warning voice, in the very midst of the war of Armageddon, is a hint not to be disregarded.

There is no room here, and no need, for the introduction of a half-demon Antichrist, or of a fearful religious persecution. Many terrors have been distorted from their true meaning, and removed from their true place, the past. It will be enough, if the present fearful war is allowed to continue as it has begun, increasing in hatred

and savagery, drawing in more and more nations, causing more and more wanton destruction of life and property—for such a condition to be reached as must bring in the Lord's Return. Only thus can truth and right be vindicated. Only thus can the world again have peace,—for science itself has become Satan's agent, devoted to the purposes of war.[1]

The Seventh Vial. (Rev. xvi. 17-21.)

The seventh Vial is poured into the air; the surroundings and conditions of man's life on earth are changed. The end of the age has come, and with it the coming of the Lord.

But as in the case of the seventh Trumpet, so here, the details are left to a later chapter, separated from this one by explanatory visions. All that is here stated is that this Vial will bring in the greatest changes earth has ever seen: that all earthly powers will disappear; that Babylon will be punished: that there will be a great hail from heaven,—probably a figure of the destruction of all shams, great and small, the "refuge of lies,"[2]—and that these events are connected with the end of the age. There is heard a loud voice from heaven, "It is done." It is the end of a Dispensation, in the purposes of God.

Babylon and the Beast. (Rev. xvii.)

The seventeenth and eighteenth chapters form together an explanatory addition to the Vials—as the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth chapters

[1] On Antichrist, see Note E. [2] Isa. xxviii. 17.

do to the Trumpets, and as the seventh chapter does to the Seals.

In each of the three cases the explanatory matter has particular reference to the visions to which it is attached, and has a wider outlook as well.

The subject of the seventeenth chapter is introduced as an explanation given by one of the seven Vial-angels. This is the case also in a later chapter, the twenty-first. In both passages the symbol described is a woman : evil in one case, pure and holy in the other.

A woman is the symbol of a Church ; there is in the Apocalypse itself a third example, the woman of the twelfth chapter, representing the Jewish Church. The woman of the twenty-first chapter is without doubt the true Church of Christ, as completed and caught up to meet the returning Bridegroom. The woman in the seventeenth chapter must be a Church also, though described as corrupt and unholy.

That is the first clue. The second is to be found in the seven heads, as interpreted by an angel in the ninth verse—taken in connection with the statement at the end of the chapter : "the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth."

No other city can be meant than Rome, ruling the earth at the time of the vision, and built, as is well known, on seven hills. One does not need to be a Protestant in order to identify the woman here as the Church of Rome. The only question that can be raised is the time to which the prophecy refers,—whether it is past, present or to come,—a question naturally raised by

members of the Roman Church, when dealing with this chapter.

It will be shown here, that the time to which the symbol particularly refers is fixed quite clearly by some of its details: and that it represents the condition of the Church of Rome (the Woman) and the Papal Power (the Beast that carries her), at the time when that Church was at her worst, and that power at its greatest,—not fully applying either to earlier or later days; still less to the whole of the long period predicted in the thirteenth chapter as the duration of the Papal power. The seventeenth chapter contains no definite note of time.

This limitation of the meaning is brought out by the constant use in the angel's interpretation of the phrase "which thou sawest." It is "the woman which thou sawest," "the Beast which thou sawest," "the ten horns which thou sawest," "the waters which thou sawest": that is, *as shown in this particular vision*,—for the woman, the Beast, the horns, the waters, were each of them to have a long history, and only at one particular period would they fully correspond with the details of this complex figure.

The ground being thus cleared, it is possible, without bias, to consider the details of the symbolism, which are complicated, but very fully explained by the angel interpreter.

A woman, full of impurity, decked out with costly ornaments, and showy colours, holding a cup full of abominations, and drunk with the blood of the saints, is seen sitting on a Beast, which has seven heads and ten horns, and is marked with names of blasphemy: on her forehead is her name, "Mystery, Babylon."

That, in short, is the description of the symbol, "as seen" by St. John. The angel not only explains it, as here seen, but gives particulars of the earlier and later history of the woman, the Beast, and the ten horns. In so doing, he interprets the symbolism of the thirteenth chapter, which represents, as might be expected, an earlier form of the Beast here described. The Dragon's crowns had, in that symbol, passed from the heads to the horns ; in this later symbol they have disappeared altogether.

It has been shown that the woman must stand for the Church of Rome—at some time in its history.

Now the Church of Rome, in the condition which provoked the Reformation, was full of corruption and idolatry. This is simply a matter of history, and is abundantly proved by evidence taken from the writers of those days, even among Romanists themselves. It is not necessary to soil these pages with quotations on such a question, they can be found elsewhere. It will be enough to note here, that while some of the Popes of that period were "monsters of iniquity," the clergy were "open and notorious evil livers" : the people could pay for sin, however vile, and be accounted holy ; superstition and idolatry had overlaid the Christian faith ; and all the time the rulers of the Church were rich and powerful, its outward trappings costly and magnificent.

To this condition of corruption was added, during the great crisis, the blood-guiltiness of persecution : responsibility for the sufferings of millions of Christian martyrs. The vision, with the accuracy which has been noticed elsewhere,

reserves the prediction to a later verse: "I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the Saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." It would be impossible to find any human figure, which could more accurately or vividly depict the cruel and continuous persecutions of Protestant Christians, which disfigure the history of the Papal Church.

St. John wonders, as well he may, at such a spectacle. The angel proceeds to *tell him the mystery*, that is, to *interpret the symbolism*, of the Woman and the Beast, in the verses that follow.

The Beast, *in the condition here seen*, was, and is not, and shall come. It represents a power which existed first as Imperial Rome, then ceased to exist when the Barbarians destroyed the Western Empire, and yet was found later on, revived and strong, under the Papacy.

The secret of the paradox is to be found in the nature of this revived power. It ascends from the bottomless pit, the abode of the evil one: and it goes finally to perdition. Neither of these phrases apply to the ordinary empires of earth. Empires are symbolised by wild-beasts, that are strong for a time, and come to an end. The Beast, as seen in this vision, is a Satanic revival, personating and imitating the power of the old Roman Empire, which had, as a matter of fact, been wholly destroyed: a revival brought about entirely for the benefit of the Woman-rider, the Papal Church. It had no emperor, or senate, or legions: it was "spiritual" and impalpable; yet it was so real and terrible, that it could wage successful war against the people of God.

This Papal empire has already been seen in

the Apocalypse, in the thirteenth chapter: and there, as here, it is spoken of as a cause of wonder and fascination to the world. For there, as here, it is described as in some sense *risen from the dead.* One of its seven heads receives a mortal wound, and yet the Beast lives on. It is left to this later vision to explain, that the wounded head is the *last* or seventh head, and that the Woman-rider takes the place of a head, and controls the Beast, when all the seven heads have lost their power.

The seven heads are interpreted by the angel in two ways. They represent the *seven hills* of Rome: and they represent *seven kings.* These "seven kings" cannot stand for individual rulers, because when the last of them is fallen, the Beast as seen in this vision succeeds: and a beast is never in prophecy used as a symbol for an individual. Nor is there any example of the head of a beast being used to symbolise an individual. When Alexander the Great and his four generals are made the subject of prophecy in the Book of Daniel, they are represented by horns, not heads. The "seven kings" cannot be individual rulers, and they cannot, from the nature of the prophecy, be contemporary; they must succeed one another. We are therefore shut up to the conclusion that these "seven kings" represent seven successive forms of Roman government, of which five had passed away when St. John received the vision.

Two well-known Latin historians, Livy and Tacitus, one of whom wrote in St. John's day, give us lists of the forms of Roman rule, which leave us in no doubt as to the meaning of the first five heads. They mention kings, consuls,

dictators, decemvirs, military tribunes—five in all. The sixth head, ruling when St. John lived, must stand for despotic emperors.

Up to this point, the angel's words have been simply descriptive, not prophetical: for the seventh head alone was then future. What is the meaning of this seventh head? To answer the question, it will be necessary to glance for a moment at Roman history.

The early emperors ruled in the character of military commanders; they were Pagans; and they ruled over the whole empire, with Rome as the centre of their authority. The later emperors ruling at Rome had a different character and office: they professed Christianity; they ruled only a part of the empire, and were subject to another emperor ruling in the East. The empire, as a whole, had changed in its prophetic designation, from *the fourth* (which describes it in one of the Seals) to *the third* (which marks it throughout the Trumpet-period): and that change in the character of the empire corresponds with the change from the sixth to the seventh form of government—from the sixth to the seventh head of the Beast. For the seventh head represents the last form of Roman imperial rule, which lasted about 140 years. During that time, the ruler at Rome professed Christianity; he was no longer independent; and the empire as a whole had its seat of power far away in the East.

With the fall of the seventh head, in A.D. 476, the Beast should have ended his career, for no ruling head remained. The seven heads are henceforth phantoms or outlines, left only for the completeness of the symbol.

But he survives, or rather revives, *without a ruling head*—that is what makes the world wonder—as an *eighth form of Roman power*. It is a mistake to speak of the "eighth head" of the Beast: it has only seven heads, and at this stage they are all fallen. The angel's words are very accurate. The Beast—just because he has no ruling head left to wield his authority—is described as *himself the eighth:*[1] not the eighth *head*—for he is no ordinary ruler—but the eighth *form of Roman rule;* for only seven heads are mentioned, and this last form of rule is not described as a *head* but as "*of the seven*" heads: that is to say, it is a revival, not of any one of them, but of the great world-power which had been built up under them.

It is worth while to note here, that this eighth form of Roman power, is the power wielded by *the Papacy*, and does not represent the "Holy Roman Empire" of the Middle Ages. That title did indeed survive in Christendom for a thousand years: but for most of that time, it was little more than a title. It was the result of an attempt, on the part of the Papacy, to embody in an outward form the revived power of Rome, which the Popes themselves wielded: in other words, to give an eighth head to the Roman Beast. It did not succeed—for when the chosen "emperor" was strong, he did not always support the Pope, and when he was weak, his support was of little value. But it has a distinct interest for the student of prophecy.

There remains the angel's interpretation of the ten horns, which form a part of the combined

[1] Rev. xvii. 11: R.V.

symbol. It is in two parts. The first part consisting of three verses (12-14), describes their meaning, and their earlier career as supporters of the Beast. The second, consisting of two verses (16, 17), describes their final change of policy, and its results.

These ten horns represent ten kings, which have no place in the prophecy until the last of the seven heads has ceased to rule. This may be inferred (1) from the statement that they have received no kingdom in the days of St. John, when the sixth head had power; and (2) from the obvious connection between the eleventh and twelfth verses, as regards the condition of the Beast; a connection which shows that the Beast in his *eighth or headless* form exists alongside of the ten kings.

It is quite clear that these "ten kings" are not individual rulers, but represent, in accordance with Eastern and Biblical usage, *the ruling powers of ten kingdoms.*[1] The eighth form of Roman power, the power wielded by the Papal Church, has been recognised for centuries as an important factor in history. The "ten kings" must be looked for alongside of this power, and contemporary with it. They are, in fact, the group of states, never far from ten in number, that have occupied the territory of the old Roman empire since its fall, and have given the Papacy its power.

The strange idea that these ten kingdoms have not yet arisen, because there have not been always and exactly ten such states, is quite untenable. For, in the first place, it involves a gap

[1] Note F.

of at least fourteen centuries in the middle of the fulfilment of a single Apocalyptic symbol. There is no suggestion of such a gap in the symbol of the Beast. And, secondly, it looks for a mathematical accuracy of fulfilment which is out of keeping with prophetic usage, as shown in the exactly parallel case of the fourfold division of Alexander's empire, predicted in the eighth chapter of Daniel.[1] The same form of symbol is there used—four horns on the head of a Beast. The same angelic interpretation is given,—*four kingdoms shall arise.* The continuance of those kingdoms is suggested by a reference to the later days of one of them. History shows that the division into exactly four was not at once, nor for more than a few years; yet no one has been unwise enough to suppose that the fourfold division of the Greek Empire is still future. It is quite as unreasonable to look to the future for the tenfold division of the Roman Empire, which came to an end many centuries ago; especially in view of the fact that from that day to this there have been ten states, more or less—often exactly ten,—occupying the territory of old Rome.

Another proof of the impersonal character of these ten kings is to be found in connection with the ten horns which in the Book of Daniel undoubtedly represent the same powers. Three of those horns are said to be uprooted by the little horn, which corresponds with the combined symbol of the Woman and the Beast in its eighth form, in this prophecy. If the ten kings which they represent are individuals, then only

[1] Dan. viii. 8, 22.

seven of the kings are left to finally unseat the Woman,—which contradicts the later prophecy. If, on the contrary, they represent kingdoms, or states, no difficulty arises. The continual shifting of national boundaries might soon restore the number of kingdoms to "about ten," as before: and this actually happened, when the Papacy, in its early days, got possession of its "Temporal Power" at the expense of neighbouring states: and it is an uprooting which is by some writers believed to have found a permanent memorial in the triple crown which is worn by the Pope.

The number ten is introduced into every prophetic symbol that relates to Rome; and it is used more perhaps as a mark of distinction, by which Rome may be everywhere identified, than as indicating an exact division of its territory after its fall.

The ten horns are not, strictly speaking, on the Beast at all. The sixteenth verse should read, as in the Revised Version, "the ten horns *and* the Beast." They are on the seven heads, and they have no separate significance in the prophecy until the last or seventh head has lost its power. They are then, as it were, set free, and enter into the prophetic outline as ten independent powers. Historically, they represent the new "Romance" nations, which were formed within the territories of the fallen empire, by the fusion of the Barbarian invaders with the conquered peoples. They gradually developed into the nations of modern Europe. They still regarded Rome as their common centre, and they formed the strength of that revived Roman authority which was made use of by the Papacy

for its own aggrandisement. They agreed, as the prophecy expresses it, to give their power and strength unto the Beast; and therefore, to the controller of the Beast, the Papal Church. Thus it came about that they were found making war with the Lamb, more particularly at the time of the Reformation. The outward evidence of His victory was the final establishment of Protestantism, which reversed the results of the victory of the Beast in earlier days.[1]

From that time onwards the change of policy on the part of the ten kingdoms, predicted in the sixteenth verse, has been going on step by step. The Protestant states set the example of revolt from the Papacy. The Roman Catholic states began, later on, to withdraw their support. The French Revolution was in one aspect a revolt against the Papal religion. France returned indeed to Roman Catholicism, but not to her former whole-hearted devotion to the Papacy: and her government has quite recently done away with Papal ascendancy, by the Separation Law. The same is true of Portugal: and to-day Papal ascendancy, in political matters, is almost confined to Germany and Austria.

The case of Italy must be separately mentioned. Roman Catholics used to boast, that since the emperors left Rome, that city had known no ruler but the Pope. Within the last half-century, that has been changed. Rome has become the capital of a united and anti-Papal state, which never had a place among the ten kingdoms. As the ten-horned Beast in prophecy is always *the power that rules from*

[1] Compare Rev. xiii. 7 with Rev. xvii. 14.

Rome, it is possible that the kingdom of Italy is here for a moment given that title, when the angel says that the ten kings *and the Beast* shall hate and despoil the Papal Church. In any case, the Woman is no longer seated on the Beast, for the Papal Church has lost its temporal power, as well as the greater part of the secular support of the nations that formerly upheld it.

The Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet or second beast, all appear again in the Apocalypse, but only in mysterious allusions to their end, in connection with the Second Coming of the Lord. Their power to injure has been in some degree lost before that day arrives: but they are all summoned on the stage, as it were, at the last, to receive their sentence, before the curtain falls upon them.

The Fall of Babylon. (Rev. xviii.)

The last verse of the seventeenth chapter is an introduction to the contents of the eighteenth. This would be seen better if the chapter divisions, which have no authority, were removed.

The Woman, Babylon, "is the great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth."

This statement is useful as fixing the meaning of the Woman. It is also useful as fixing the meaning of the chapter that follows. The *Woman*, Babylon, is a *city*: and the statement is followed immediately by the prediction of the fall of a city, whose name is Babylon. The only conclusion possible is that the *Woman* in the earlier chapter, and the *city* in the later one, are both symbols of the same reality: and that

reality, a power connected, not with the literal Babylon on the Euphrates, but with Rome, which was the city then "reigning over the kings of the earth."

This conclusion is simply a logical necessity, apart from any questions as to the actual power intended, or the particular time referred to.

But as a Woman is the natural symbol for a Church, and is constantly so used, the power wielded for centuries by the Church of Rome is very clearly indicated. This view is supported, as has been shown, by many of the details of the angel's explanation in the seventeenth chapter.

In the eighteenth chapter, an angel of great authority comes down from heaven, and proclaims the fall of Babylon. If Babylon means here the power of the Church of Rome, is this fall to be regarded as past or yet to come?

The answer depends on the meaning of the warning voice to God's servants still in the city, "to come out of her," as Lot came out of Sodom; and on the meaning of the lament, which is at the same time a song of deliverance, occupying the rest of the chapter.

The warning voice was certainly heard and acted on, in Reformation days. In spite of a reign of terror more systematic than any other that the world has seen, millions came out of the only Church they knew, taking their lives in their hands, and staking all on a new understanding of the Word of God. This is a simple matter of history. The question remains—Is it the Papal Church and its "fall," that is described in the striking figures of this chapter?

A satisfactory answer to the question is not impossible, now that we have reached what

seem like the "last days." It must be remembered, that the poetic and figurative language here used is of the same kind as that used about the fall of literal Babylon in the Old Testament. Jeremiah, in his fifty-first chapter, uses many of the actual phrases which occur in this chapter, and he applies them to Babylon. That city, *dwelling on many waters*, was suddenly to *fall* and be destroyed; *recompense* was to be rendered her, for her judgment had *reached to heaven:* God had made her a *golden cup* in His hand making the nations *drunk with her wine.* God's people are bidden to *come out of her*, that they be not *cut off in her iniquity. Heaven and earth* will *rejoice over her fall.*[1] Even the angel who in the Apocalypse casts a stone into the sea, with the words, "Thus with a mighty fall shall Babylon be cast down, and shall be found no more at all"—is only repeating a symbolic action and utterance of exactly the same kind in Jeremiah's prophecy.[2]

In Isaiah other features of this prophecy are found, also in connection with Babylon: her boast, "I shall be a lady for ever; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children"; the multitude of her sorceries; and the merchants who have trafficked with her.[3]

Thus the language used of literal Babylon's fall is simply repeated in the case of mystical Babylon. History has shown that even in the case of ancient Babylon they were not to be understood literally. There was no sudden and

[1] Jer. li. 13, 8, 6, 9, 7, 45, 6, 48.

[2] Jer. li. 63, 64.

[3] Isa. xlvii. 7, 8, 9, 15.

violent destruction of the city when it fell, but the collapse of a great authority, which had been used for the promotion of idolatry, and the oppression of God's people. Babylon remained a great city, the capital of a province, long after its "fall."

The Jews came out of it in comparatively small numbers, and at different times, not all at once. The rejoicing related, in fact, mainly to the destruction of Babylon's ascendancy, which had been, for the whole of its seventy years' duration, a disaster to God's people Israel. The figures used to describe its fall are such as would naturally occur in the vivid imagery of Eastern poetry, and therefore in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. They were, in the end, abundantly fulfilled.

When the same figures occur again in the New Testament, in a song of rejoicing, and lamentation, over the fall of spiritual Babylon, similar principles of interpretation must be applied. There is even less reason than there was in the Old Testament for treating them literally. The fall of Babylon will mean the loss of authority by the once dominant Papal Church, which is already in large part an accomplished fact, but will not be completed till the Lord's return.

The contents of the two chapters may be summed up thus:—

The earlier chapter describes the Papal Church, under the figure of a Woman; how for a long time it was upheld by the powers of the Roman world, and how those powers finally changed their policy for one of hostility and spoliation.

The later chapter, taking up the history at this point, that is to say, at the fall of the Papal Church from supremacy, makes use of the other figure, a city—after a statement that the same power is symbolised—and describes, in the highly poetic language of the Old Testament prophets, the fall of the city of Babylon, the lament of the world, and the rejoicing of God's people.

The fall of literal Babylon was in two stages, far apart in time: and the first is as prominent in the prophecies as the second. It fell first when it lost its supremacy, and Israel escaped from bondage and exile. It fell completely when long afterwards, its enemies made an end of it, and left it to become the heap of ruins it is to-day.

The same stages are found in the fall of the power of the Papal Church: three, perhaps, rather than two. There was first a foretaste, in the terrible sack of Rome, an indirect result of the Reformation, the probable fulfilment of the "fall of Babylon" in the fourteenth chapter. There was the fall from supremacy, which resulted from the Reformation as a whole, and has been for the Christian world a deliverance from captivity. There is a movement now among the nations tending to reduce more and more the political power of the Papacy: but there will be in the future, when the Lord returns, a complete end of that, and all other hostile powers.

There is no allusion here to the Church of Rome as a self-contained religious body, including many true souls—but to its mischievous activities in claiming headship over all other

Churches, in refusing fellowship to all other Christians, and in using unworthy and unchristian methods to gain its ends.

As the Apostle Peter was *Satan* so long as he tempted Christ—and as the Jews were the *synagogue of Satan* so long as they set themselves up against the Christian Church—so the Church of Rome is *Babylon*, so long as it opposes the true teachings of Christ, and persecutes those who follow them.

Whenever and wherever it is not doing these things, but is teaching, however imperfectly, the way of salvation, it has its place among the Churches which make up Christendom, and the millions that belong to the Church of Rome will be judged, not by its sins in the past or in the present, but by their own personal faith, and according to their light.

In these two chapters, a Vial-angel shows, by means of a double symbol—a Woman and a City—the Papal Church, worldly and corrupt. In the twenty-first chapter, a Vial-angel shows, by means of a double symbol—a Woman and a City—the true spiritual Church, complete and ready for the Bridegroom's coming. The symbolic treatment is the same: the spiritual contrast is complete.

If any reader is inclined to think that the language of the chapter is too strong, even when allowance has been made for its poetic character, let him read some of the contemporary accounts of the pride, the wealth, the luxury, and the cruelty of the Papal Church at the height of its power. The winning of religious liberty at the time of the Reformation was one of the greatest victories achieved in the progress of mankind:

and it was only won at a tremendous cost of human suffering.

The Second Advent. (Rev. xix.)

"Mystery, Babylon," has been fully described, in terms which make its identification easy: its fall from power has been celebrated in the stately language of Hebrew poetry: and now, in the nineteenth chapter, the praise of heaven follows the victory. Every act of *vindication* of God in His world, when foretold in the Apocalypse, is followed by a burst of heavenly praise.

Here, as before, Babylon is spoken of under two figures. In the second verse, she is a Woman, degraded: in the third a City, burnt. The two figures are never separated, as those have supposed who refer them to different objects, or to different times.

At this point, the Living Creatures and the Elders are again noticed, and appear for the last time. They seem to have a connection with the prophecies of this present dispensation, and they disappear from the vision when those prophecies are ended. All that follows, to the end of the Apocalypse, relates to new conditions, at first "millennial," then spiritual and eternal.

The first indication of the end of this age, in the prophecy, is the allusion to the Bride, the Lamb's Wife. She represents, evidently, the Church of true Christians, ready to be caught up to meet the Bridegroom at the second Coming.

The Churches of earth are made up of worthy and unworthy members—wheat and tares, which cannot be separated until the harvest. When Christ comes back, all true Christians are caught

up to meet Him. The dead in Christ are raised, living Christians are changed, and together they go up to meet Him as He comes. St. Paul states these things in the plainest possible words, and with prophetic authority.[1]

In that day for the first time, it will be seen who are true members of the Church on earth. "One shall be taken, and the other left."[2] Those taken form the Bride here referred to: a symbol in the sharpest contrast with the Woman, the corrupt earthly Church, of the seventeenth chapter.

"The great company" whose voice, as heard in heaven, is twice here recorded,[3] though they are not seen, is probably intended to symbolise the dead in Christ, who with living Christians are at this point to receive their reward. They are only separated from the Bride for reasons of symbolism. They are not in heaven as yet, but their voice is heard there, like the voice of the martyrs under the fifth Seal.

The symbolism is that of a marriage, and a marriage-supper. The feast was to an Eastern marriage what our service is to a Christian marriage of to-day—the essential ceremony. The feast is therefore quite naturally put for the marriage itself, as is constantly done, in the case of our own religious service. But the union of Christ with His Church is best described as a marriage when the Church is figured as a Woman: and as a marriage feast, when the Church is spoken of as a great multitude, who are then regarded as the invited guests. The

[1] 1 Thess. iv. 15-17. [2] Matt. xxiv. 40, 41.
[3] Rev. xix. 1, 6.

great multitude and the Bride of whom they speak are two companies of Christians, but they share the same destiny, that of being "for ever with the Lord."

The end of the Revelation, so far as it concerns this present age, has come, and St. John, satisfied and thankful, falls down in worship—as again in a later chapter.[1] In each case, he is reproved: worship is not due to angels. In each case, the angel is a Vial-angel, who has made a special revelation to St. John: the first, of the Woman Babylon and her punishment: the second of the Bride and her destiny (Rev. xvii. 1—xix. 10: xxi. 9—xxii. 9).

Then begins "the age to come." John sees "heaven opened" again, as at the beginning of his vision. A white horse is seen, and on it a Rider who can only be Christ, coming back in power and glory. He is the Word of God: He has eyes like fire, and many crowns of royalty:[2] He is righteous, true, and faithful: His robe is dipped in blood—the blood of conquered enemies, as in the sixty-third chapter of Isaiah. Out of His mouth proceeds a sword, for His Word is power. He is to rule all nations with a rod of iron, as King of kings and Lord of lords.

With Him are the armies of heaven, mounted on white horses, emblems of triumphant war.

A loud voice from the centre of all authority, —an angel standing in the sun,—summons the birds of prey to a great battle-field. This is without doubt the war of Armageddon, referred to in its proper place in an earlier chapter:[3] for it is a gathering of the kings of the earth, and their armies, in association with the Beast and

[1] Rev. xxii. 8. [2] Note N. [3] Chap. xvi. 14-16.

the False Prophet. These two powers are both cast into the lake of fire, and their followers are slain.

Now the war of Armageddon, which ushers in the seventh Vial, brings in also the return of Christ as conqueror, here described. That return has the seventh Vial as one of its consequences, a Vial poured upon the air, creating new conditions for man's life upon the earth, bringing to an end man's worst enemies, destroying at one blow all those who are found fighting against God.

It would be absurd to suppose that a battle is literally fought, or that armies literally gather, against Christ at His Return. The armies of the world will be occupied in that day in fighting against each other: but some only among them will have a righteous cause, and fight honourably. Christ's Return will scatter all His enemies, as darkness is scattered before the dawn. They will be destroyed by the brightness of His coming.[1] And if His coming is to find the world in arms (as recent events suggest) the call to the birds of prey will be more than a mere figure.[2]

The Binding of Satan. (Rev. xx.)

The Return of Christ, which is the main subject of the nineteenth chapter, brings in a new set of conditions for mankind. It closes the present dispensation, and introduces the *age to come.*

But Christ's Return is found to lead, not to an

[1] 2 Thess. ii. 8.

[2] See Note D, on the Second Advent.

eternal and heavenly kingdom, but to a temporary and earthly one. The eternal kingdom still lies beyond.

This view of the meaning of the opening verses of the twentieth chapter is no new fancy.[1] It was held by all the early writers, with exceptions that can be explained, for three hundred years after the Ascension. It gives an explanation of a score of chapters of Old Testament prophecy, and shows the only way in which they can be fulfilled. It shows how the particular work of Christ as Saviour of *the world,* is to prove a success, and not, as hitherto, a failure. It explains various references made in the New Testament to the *regeneration* of all things. It is a view which is based upon the plainest possible statements of Holy Scripture.

If words mean anything, a "millennial" age of happiness *on this earth* is predicted in the twentieth chapter of the Apocalypse.

There is, moreover, a special fitness in the facts predicted, that the place of Christ's humiliation should be also the place of His manifested kingdom: that the world, which has heen so long separated from its rightful King, should become His at last, not merely for a moment, and that the moment of its end. Considerations like these should help to a more ready acceptance of the plain teaching of the Apocalypse with regard to the Millennium.

The Beast and the False Prophet have been put out of the way, and their followers destroyed. The Dragon, Satan, is then chained and imprisoned in the Abyss, that he may no longer

[1] Note M.

deceive the nations. Such results might be expected from the return of Christ in glory. But at this point a new and unexpected truth is revealed. *At the end of a thousand years, Satan is to be set loose, for a moment, to tempt the nations of the world.* Only then will come the general resurrection, and the day of judgment. Only then will there be an end of *death.*

Further, this period of a thousand years is six times mentioned in plain terms, with no hint of symbolism. During that time, the martyrs (or perhaps all Christians) are to reign with Christ, not *in*, but *over* the world: and this statement is twice repeated in plain words. A *first resurrection* at the beginning of the period, and a *general resurrection* at the end of it, are very carefully distinguished. The loosing of Satan for a time, at the end of the thousand years, is apparently a final test of the faithfulness of living nations. There is a rebellion, stopped by fire from heaven: and Satan is finally cast into the lake of fire, along with *Death*, and his symbolic companion, *Hades*, the place of the dead.

This revelation of what has been called the Millennium, because it is to last a thousand years, is not new, but adds two particulars to that which was already revealed in earlier prophecy:—the duration, a thousand years; and the rebellion at the close.

Isaiah has many chapters descriptive of conditions of peace and happiness to be one day realised upon this earth: they cannot be explained away.[1]

[1] *e.g.* Isa. xi. : xxv. : xxxv. : lx.

St. Paul writing to the Thessalonians, speaks of Christ's Return, as the time when all who are His people will rise from the dead, or be changed if living, and caught away from earth to meet Him: a first resurrection, a privilege for them only.[1]

Writing later to the Corinthians, he carries this prediction further. After Christ's Coming, and the first resurrection, there is to be a reign of Christ, lasting till all His enemies are subdued, "all rule and all authority and power" put down. Then, and not before, Christ is to give up His kingdom to the Father, "that God may be all in all." Then and not before, there is to be an end of *death*.[2]

There are several other passages which speak of the saints reigning with Christ, apparently over the world. The promise made to the disciples is of this kind: they are to be given thrones of judgment, from which to judge the tribes of Israel.[3] In another place it is promised that those who suffer with Christ will also reign with Him.[4] Whether the privilege is confined to martyrs or not, nothing could give greater satisfaction to those who have suffered for their faith in Christ, than to have a part with Him in bringing the earth back to its allegiance to its rightful King, and making it a place of peace and happiness.

The passage in the Apocalypse puts these predictions together, adds to them, and makes the picture complete. It seems to suggest the following outline :—

[1] 1 Thess. iv. 17. [2] 1 Cor. xv. 24-26.

[3] Luke xxii. 30. [4] 2 Tim. ii. 12.

In the midst of a world-war, like that now raging, Christ returns to claim and carry off His servants, from among both dead and living, and to set the affairs of the world on a new footing. He may come silently—the *shout*, the *voice*, the *trump*, of which St. Paul speaks, may be the figurative expression of the fact, that *all the world will know* He has come, and be terrified. He may not be visible to the world when He comes, but only to His own servants, as at His ascension ; in any case *every eye will see Him*, at the end. But in that moment of His coming, two amazing things will happen. All true Christians will be caught away from earth to Him : and all who are found fighting against Him and His cause will die. The war will end—suddenly. The world's eyes will be opened. The Jews will believe, and will become zealous missionaries. And men will find, when they have recovered from the shock, and buried their dead, that things have changed in a strange way. Not only are evil men removed, but evil desires are checked, and it is easier to do right than wrong. The world will become a place of peace and happiness, through the unseen influence of Christ and those who reign with Him, and the absence of the power of Satan.

Thus for a thousand years will the world be regenerate : and Christ's work will be vindicated, in its relation to the earth.

When for a moment at its close God's restraining hand is removed, it will be seen that man's heart is unchanged, even in a Paradise. But the rebels have no sooner declared themselves, than they are destroyed by fire from heaven.

Then the end will come: the end of Satan's power to injure: the end of man's probation: the end of death itself, the last enemy: the end of earth, and of the earthly heaven: the end of all that is transient and corruptible. All the powers of evil will be put away. All men will be judged by One who makes no mistakes.

And then—Eternity.

That is a summary of the passages, taken together, from Isaiah, Thessalonians, Corinthians and the Apocalypse. They supplement each other. An attempt has been made to give them actuality—that is all.

But there is nothing in the whole range of Christian doctrine which is more unwelcome to "the modern mind" than the idea of such an earthly Millennium. It is essentially miraculous, in its beginning and in its end: and "modern thought" can find no place for miracles in its conception of God's world. A writer on the Apocalypse, if he knows anything of its meaning, and of Christian history, knows that the Book is in itself a miracle—and does not mind about "modern thought": remembering that what is known as "modern thought" is really of German origin, and that it has helped to make Germany what it is to-day. God has predicted the course of Christian history with wonderful precision. What remains will be fulfilled in its time, however men may disbelieve it.

A new heaven and a new earth. (Rev. xxi.)

The Millennial age, which is the chief subject of the twentieth chapter, is full of difficulty, but it may in part be understood, for it does at least

relate to this world, and the physical conditions of human life are apparently unchanged. As far as the world is concerned, death is not ended: men live and die, and have sorrow, pain and separation.

But when the next age is reached, as it is in the twenty-first chapter, the difficulties, to our finite understanding, become insuperable. There is "no more sea:" so that the conditions of the earth, if the earth still remains at all, are wholly changed. There is *no more death*: so that even the physical conditions of mankind are altered. All things are become new: and it is impossible to do more than reverently study the inspired description which God has given of the strange good things to come.

The general impression produced upon the mind of the reader may be stated, with great diffidence, as follows:—

All true Christians are with Christ in glory during the thousand years, not on earth, though having a share in Christ's spiritual reign over the earth, during that time. They make up the Bride, and their thousand years of life with Him, sharing His glory and His work, correspond perhaps with the marriage-supper, or with the marriage of the Lamb.

At the end of the thousand years, the conditions are changed. All the living and the dead, except those already with Christ, as a consequence of the first resurrection, receive their final portion, good or bad. Death and all evil things are put away, together with the earth itself. The conditions of Eternity are reached.

But Eternity can only be described to us under the forms of time: and so the conditions

are described as those of a perfected earth, new and endless, occupied by nations of incorruptible beings, among whom, like a glorious city, the martyrs and saints of the Christian ages have a position of pre-eminence.

It was a Bride that went up to heaven : it is a City that comes down to the new earth . It has been pointed out how the double figure is used —a Woman and a City—of the corrupt Church as well as of the true. The Harlot is also Babylon ; the Bride is also New Jerusalem. Her coming down to the new earth, and taking a central position among the nations, marks the completion of God's purpose towards mankind, the removal of the last limitations remaining during the Millennial age.

All the redeemed of mankind are thus seen united in a perfect world, for an endless day, in the presence of God and of Christ.

That is the picture. The reality is quite beyond our imagination. It is a bright object of hope and faith, seen only, as yet, like the sun, in the far distance.

There are in the picture some things which need more particular attention.

(1) The passing of heaven and earth, and the coming of eternity, are here marked by the words, *It is done*, uttered by Christ Himself. The same words—they are only one word in the Greek—follow the pouring out of the last Vial, which ends the present age.[1] The same words, uttered by Christ upon the Cross, ended the Old Testament dispensation.[2] Thus the end of each of the three great ages, or dispensations, is

[1] Rev. xvi. 17. [2] John xix. 30.

marked by the same words, divinely uttered,—*It is done.* Two different words are indeed used in the Greek, but with almost the same meaning.

(2) The description of New Jerusalem, as a symbol of the true Christian Church, recalls the symbolism used in other passages. Christ is predicted as a foundation stone:[1] and St. Paul compares the Church to a building raised on Christ as its foundation.[2] St. Peter, to whom Christ addressed His mysterious words about the founding of the Church, is even more definite in his use of the figure, for he describes Christians as *living stones* built upon Christ.[3] St. Paul comes nearest to the symbolism used in the Apocalypse, when in another place, he says Christians "*are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone: a habitation of God through the Spirit.*"[4]

(3) The City is marked with one number only —the number twelve. The word occurs nine times in the description, besides its connection with the measurements of the wall, a hundred and forty four cubits. Twelve is the number of Israel, as seven is that of the Christian Church. The number seven, so freely used in the earlier part of the prophecy, is not found in the description of the Holy City. It is a reminder that the olive-tree, into which the Church has been grafted, belongs of right to Israel, and that before the end is reached, Israel will have been grafted again into *their own olive-tree.*[5]

[1] Isa. xxviii. 16. [2] 1 Cor. iii. 11.
[3] 1 Pet. ii. 5-8. [4] Eph. ii. 20-22.
[5] Rom. xi. 16-24.

Postscripts. (Rev. xxii.)

In the last chapter of the Apocalypse, the description of the New Jerusalem, the Bride, is completed: its river, full of living water, and its trees of life, on each side of the river, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, month by month, and healing leaves. The Throne of God and of the Lamb,—it is one only,—is there: and God is there, in the midst of His servants, who do His bidding, and with Him reign for an endless day.

That is the picture. It is impossible to explain its *meaning*, difficult even to paraphrase it. It is enough that it is set before us, as an object of faith, hope, and encouragement. One day its meaning will be revealed.

The Vial-angel who shows St. John the picture, and is the object of his mistaken worship, adds only a few words, which, recalling as they do its opening verses, form a fitting close to the whole prophecy: "*The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show unto His servants the things which must shortly come to pass.*"[1]

Following, as they do here, a vision of things which most certainly lie in the far future, their meaning in both places is made plain: that the Revelation of Jesus Christ deals with things which even in the days of St. John were beginning to be fulfilled.

With a warning, "I *come quickly*," and a blessing on the attentive reader, the wonderful prophecy is brought to an end.

[1] Rev. xxii. 6: compare Rev. i. 1.

There follows, however, a series of short postscripts.

(1) First there is an *attestation*: "*I John am he that heard and saw these things.*" Only the strange perversity of German criticism could imagine that any other John is here meant than John the Apostle: the last survivor, the most beloved, the most highly privileged, of all the Apostles.

(2) Then St. John records his mistaken worship of the Vial-angel, a second time. For it was a Vial-angel who showed the judgment of Babylon in an earlier chapter. In each case an angel shows St. John a special vision: in each case he is so overcome as to offer worship. The angel is only a *fellow servant with prophets and saints*, and not divine.

(3) Directions are then given about the Book. It is to be *unsealed*, because its fulfilment is to begin at once. The closing vision of Daniel was to be *sealed*, because it belonged to a later age.[1] The Apocalypse has more to do with the affairs of the present dispensation, than with those of times still future.

(4) Then words are added about the conditions of the *present* dispensation. Men are to be left *free to choose well or ill:* there is to be no miracle, no prophecy, no interference with the world's normal course, from St. John's day to the coming of the Lord. It was not so in the first century, the century preceding the Apocalypse. During most of that time, there were miraculous evidences for the truth of Christianity, so cogent

[1] Dan. xii. 4.

as to almost compel belief, and to draw even unworthy people into the membership of the Church. That is the meaning of our Lord's words, "From the days of John the Baptist . . . the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."[1] With the giving of the Apocalypse was to begin an age of *normal conditions* of preaching and of faith.

(5) Then comes the announcement of the *certainty of reward.* Those who believe without having seen,[2] and faithfully serve the absent Lord, will have an instant reward, when He returns, for all that they have done.

(6) A blessing is pronounced on those who "*wash their robes*,"—or, who "*do His commandments*,"—the Greek text being here uncertain, and by the change of a few letters bearing either of these meanings,—for they alone will have a part in the Holy City, all evil men being left outside.

(7) Jesus Christ declares that the prophecy is *His prophecy*, sent by His angel, for the good of the Churches: and thus confirms its authority, and defines its purpose. Not the seven Epistles only, but the whole prophecy, is for the Christian Church, and for the present dispensation.

(8) The *Gospel invitation* is repeated, to all who are willing, and feel their need of God: and all who hear are bidden to pass on the message, which is proclaimed by the Spirit of God, and by the Church of God.

(9) The Apocalypse is declared to be a *sacred book*, and anyone corrupting it, by adding to it,

[1] Matt. xi. 12. [2] John xx. 29.

or by taking from it, will be punished by God Himself.

(10) Then, last of all, is heard once more the warning voice, "I come quickly"; and it is answered by St. John, as it should be by every Christian reader:

Even so: Come, Lord Jesus.

AN ADVENT PRAYER.

How long, O Lord, how long? A hundred years,
To Thee as nothing, pass, and pass again:
We lay our dead to rest, and we remain
To fill their place awhile. Shall not the tears
Of martyred saints of old—the bitter cry
Of saints of every age, who wait their crown,
Of saints to-day, avail to bring Thee down
To claim the world that Thou hast won. On high
We know that Thou dost reign, but here below
Thine ancient foe has power, till Thou return.
We cannot win Thy world: but we would fight
Thy battle, in Thy strength, that men may know
Thy Word has been among them; and may learn
To look, before Thou comest, to Thy light.

TO ISRAEL.

Long time, O Jew, and strangely, day by day,
On thee has fallen the avenging fire of God.
Thy crime was great: thou didst thy Saviour slay:
"On thee and on thy children" fell the rod.
Yet still, through all, He keeps thee from the sword
That is the murderer's doom,—that all may see
Thy great Jehovah keeps his plighted word;
And He will yet be glorified in thee.

NOTES

NOTE A—ON "APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE."

Some modern writers treat the Book of Daniel, and the Apocalypse, as if they were merely good samples of a large class of literature, to which the name "apocalyptic" has been given.

As a matter of fact, they stand quite alone. Their particular style has been imitated, by Jews and by Christians, as the miracles of Moses in Egypt were imitated by the magicians. The books which are classed as apocalyptic are of uncertain date and doubtful authenticity. They throw no light on the Apocalypse, and the earliest Christian writers, who make much of the Apocalypse, practically ignore them. But they have served the purpose of German criticism, which has degraded the Apocalypse from its high position and authority by placing it beside them.

The words of Professor Swete, bringing out the contrast between the Apocalypse and all other "apocalyptic literature," are worth quoting. "In the Apocalypse of John," he says, "the presence of the Spirit of Revelation is unmistakably felt, and the Christian student may be pardoned if he recognises in this book a fulfilment of the promise of a Paraclete who *shall declare . . . the things that are to come*."

But the Christian student will do well to rely, not so much on his *feelings* as he reads the Book, as on its *proved authenticity*, its quite definite claim to *divine authority*, and the evidence afforded by its *actual fulfilment*.

To one who realises with what accuracy the visions of Daniel have been fulfilled, since our Lord's day, and that the risen Christ has chosen to found upon those predictions His own special Revelation, itself wonderfully fulfilled and in process of fulfilment, the attitude of "modern thought" towards Daniel and the Apocalypse appears as a mere impertinence. For the "higher critic" begins by denying, in the case of each of these Books, the date and authorship which have been accepted, with good reason, hitherto: and goes on to confuse them with a crowd of inferior writings which have no authority:—as a prisoner, *to make identification more difficult*, is placed alongside of a number of other people, who are *rather like him in outward appearance*.

It is satisfactory to find that even under these unfair conditions, which as a scholar he accepts, Professor Swete is obliged to admit that among the writings which are classed as "apocalyptic," "the N.T. Apocalypse alone deserves the name, or is in any true sense a 'prophecy'."

NOTE B—ON "THE LORD'S DAY" (Rev. i. 10).

The suggestion, first made by Dr. S. R. Maitland, that the future "day of the Lord" is here meant, has been more recently defended by Dr. Bullinger, who translates, "I became in spirit on the day of the Lord," and so makes the

Apocalyptic vision pass over the present dispensation altogether.

It is sufficient answer to this suggestion, that the contents of the vision disprove it. In many particulars (such as the birth of the Man-Child) they obviously refer to the present dispensation. But it may be added, (1) that the "day of the Lord," when it is referred to, is never expressed by the phrase here adopted, κυριακὴ ἡμέρα, which was the name used for Sunday by the early Church; (2) that there is no more reason for translating in the tenth verse, "I became in spirit," than in the ninth verse, "I became in the island"; the word is the same; and (3) that the same words, referring to the same spiritual experience, occur again (Rev. iv. 2). and *must* in that place be translated "I was in the spirit," for there is nothing about the Lord's day, or the day of the Lord, but only "immediately."

The suggestion is dismissed by Prof. Swete (p. 13), and by Alford (on the passage), as untenable.

NOTE C—ON THE PROPHECY ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES.

Our Lord's discourse on the Mount of Olives is recorded in three of the Gospels (Matt. xxiv., Mark xiii., Luke xxi.). It is best studied in St. Matthew's account, because that is the fullest. There is not much to add to this from the other records.

The prophecy is in three distinct sections, and it is given as an answer to a two-fold question: (1) when would the temple be destroyed, as Christ had just predicted it would be; (2) what sign

would there be to show the nearness of Christ's return, and the end of the age which it would bring about (Matt. xxiv. 1-3).

The first section begins with a warning that some time must pass before Christ's return. There would come first many false Christs (v. 5), many wars and troubles (v. 6), many persecutions (v. 9), much false teaching (v. 11), much indifference (v. 12); but the Gospel would be preached all over the world before the coming of the end of this dispensation (v. 14).

The second section gives a fuller outline. It begins by promising a sign by which Christians would be warned to escape, at the right moment, from the terrors which were to come upon Jerusalem. At that time, the Jews would suffer great tribulation, such as no other nation ever suffered or will suffer (the time of this tribulation is shown, by comparison of Matt. xxiv. 15-21 with Luke xxi. 20-24, to be that of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans): yet some of the Jews would be preserved through it all (v. 22). A second warning against false Christs, especially needed in that crisis, follows (v. 23): and then the outline runs on into Christian history. Israel's troubles are to be followed by *signs* (Luke xxi. 25) in the sun, moon, and stars, the shaking of the powers that are in the heavens (Matt. xxiv. 29), associated with troubles on earth, distress, perplexity, storm, anxiety about the future (Luke xxi. 25, 26). Then *the sign of the Son of Man* is seen in heaven (v. 30); the tribes of earth mourn in consequence. Then follows the Second Advent: a visible Coming, with the clouds of heaven, in power and glory. Christ comes to reap the harvest of the world,

and His reapers are angels (v. 31), separating wheat from tares (Matt. xiii. 39-41, 49). A sign is given, the parable of a budding fig-tree (v. 32, 33). That is to say, a national revival of Israel will immediately precede the Coming of Christ and of His Kingdom: for Israel will survive to the end (v. 34, 35). The promise made through Jeremiah (Jer. xxxi. 35-37) is thus confirmed by Christ.

The third section of the prophecy deals with the nature of the Second Advent. Its time was known only to God the Father, when these words were spoken (v. 36), for Christ was still in the flesh, on earth, self-limited in knowledge for man's sake. It is to be without warning to the careless and indifferent (v. 37-39): a cause of watchfulness on the part of believers (v. 42-44): a time of reward for faithful, of punishment for unfaithful servants (v. 45-51): and the reward is to take the form of appointment to a position of authority (v. 47) suggesting the millennial age.

In the above summary of the prophecy, there are points requiring explanation.

(1) The sign given, in the second section, by which Christians might know the right moment to escape from Jerusalem, was apparently understood and acted on. Eusebius says that in consequence of a divine revelation, the Christians fled to Pella, and were safe.

(2) The *signs* in sun, moon, and stars,—sun and moon eclipsed, stars falling,—are just those found in the symbolism of other passages, but especially in the Apocalypse. They represent there the fall of the rulers of the Pagan Roman Empire (Rev. vi. 12-14): and the fall of the

Christian Empire of the West (Rev. viii. 12). They represent, in fact, the decline and fall of the great Empire of Rome, which has been described as the greatest political tragedy the world has ever seen. The fortunes of the Christian Church were bound up with it. It was associated with all the terrors here described: distress of nations, perplexity, the people in a state of anarchy and violence, men full of anxiety about the future. The great events of the period are found predicted in the Apocalypse, which is a later and fuller utterance of the same Prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apocalypse is, in fact, a key to the meaning of the earlier prophecy.

It is true that the actual events, which these signs in the heavenly bodies symbolised, did not take place "immediately" after the fall of Jerusalem, as they should have done according to St. Matthew's record of the prophecy, but two centuries later. Yet the *pledge* of their fulfilment, in the *same signs*, seen by St. John in vision, and recorded in the sixth chapter of the Apocalypse, was given only twenty-five years after Jerusalem's fall: and in the Bible a *pledge* is often treated as if it were identical with the reality,—for God's Word does not fail.

Thus it is recorded in three of the Gospels, that our Lord promised, to some of those who heard Him, that they should not die till they had seen *the Kingdom of God* (Luke ix. 27), *the Kingdom of God come with power* (Mark ix. 1), *the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom* (Matt. xvi. 28). In each case, the Transfiguration immediately follows, and is the only possible fulfilment of the promise: but that was only a

glimpse, a *pledge*, of the Kingdom and of the Coming, which are still future.

In the same way, the "fall of Babylon," which is referred to in a single verse of the fourteenth chapter of the Apocalypse, is not the great event itself, which is still future, but the *pledge* of that event, visible to all the world, in the nine-months' sack of the city of Rome and the humiliation of the Papacy, by Protestant soldiers, in A.D. 1527.

(3) As a sign was given, by which Christians might be warned in time, and escape from the fate of unbelieving Israel at Jerusalem,—so a sign is given, by which Christians may recognise the nearness of the Second Coming, and be watching for it. It is found in the parable of the fig-tree (v. 32-35) which represents the Jewish people. When the Jews show national revival, a movement towards a long-lost unity, the Coming is not far off. That is the case to-day.

(4) Our Lord, when He uttered this prophecy, declared that the time of His own return was unknown to Him. The prophecy cannot therefore be regarded as complete or systematic. His later prophecy, the Apocalypse, has no such limitation. It was received from the Father's hand: it is unsealed: it is full and systematic: and it puts the Second Advent in its proper place among the great events of earth. That event no longer stands apart from all other prophetic events. Its date will not be revealed beforehand: but if God's people rightly follow the guidance He has given, they may know when it is near, and be prepared for it.

(5) The sign of the Son of Man is undoubt-

edly *the Cross*. It was *seen in heaven*, when, in the days of Constantine, the Roman Empire professed Christianity, and cast away its idols. It has occupied the place of authority ever since, in what is known as *Christendom*.

Eusebius records a vision, seen by the emperor Constantine, to which he attributes his adoption of the Christian cause. Whether it be truth or fiction, it is a sign-post pointing to the fulfilment of this part of our Lord's prophecy. Constantine is said to have seen at mid-day, a cross in the sky, and the words, in Latin, *under this sign you will conquer*. A dream followed in which he was directed to put the cross on his banners, if he wished for victory. He did so, and was everywhere victorious, till he ruled over the whole Empire, and declared it Christian.

A similar use of the figure of *exaltation to heaven*, is found in the case of the Witnesses (Rev. xi. 12).

(6) A difficulty has been found by some, in the words which speak of *no flesh being saved*, unless the days of trouble are shortened ; and of this being done *for the elect's sake* (Matt. xxiv. 22 : Mark xiii. 20).

The difficulty occurs only in the first two records, and is explained by the third. For St. Luke, speaking evidently of the same tribulation as St. Matthew and St. Mark,—which he describes as "days of vengeance" fulfilling "all things that are written,"—puts it between the siege of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews for the Gentile period (Luke xxi. 20-24). This identifies the *tribulation*, and at the same time points to the solution of the difficulty.

As unbelieving Israel was Israel *after the flesh*

(1 Cor. x. 18), and as a pious Jew might have confidence *in the flesh* (Phil. iii. 3, 4): so *flesh* is here used of the nation of Israel, which would have been destroyed at that time, but for God's restraining hand. If He had not shortened the days, *no flesh* would have been saved.

Again, the word *elect*, or *chosen*, is used not only of the Christian Church, but of Israel, the chosen people (Isa. xlv. 4). It must here refer to the chosen remnant of the Jews, who in the great crisis were saved from destruction in fulfilment of God's purposes. Israel's position is defined in Rom. xi. 28, 29: they are not cast off, even in unbelief, for God's covenant with them is unconditional.

(7) In some particulars, our Lord's discourse has been strangely misunderstood.

It is often said that *wars and troubles* are to be a sign of the nearness of His return: yet He expressly says that this is not the case (v. 6).

The words about *false Christs* have been treated as if their fulfilment was still future. They can have no such application, and were amply fulfilled long ago, in the *thirteen false Messiahs* of Jewish history.

The *great tribulation* spoken of in this prophecy (v. 21) has in the same way been displaced. It can have no other meaning than the last crisis of Israel's national history, before its dispersion.

The most fatal mistake of all is the idea that this prophecy can be used as a key to the Apocalypse. As the latest, fullest, most systematic, and most definitely Christian, of all prophecies, the Apocalypse is itself the key to all the rest.

NOTE D—ON THE SECOND ADVENT.

I. Every writer in the New Testament bears witness to the expectation of the return of Christ in glory.

In the first three Gospels, this witness is found most clearly in the record of our Lord's prophecy on the Mount of Olives (Matt. xxiv.: Mark xiii.: Luke xxi., with which must be associated Luke xii. 35-48: Luke xvii. 20-37). It is found also in the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. xiii. 24-30. 36-43), the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. xxv. 1-13), the parable of the pounds (Luke xix. 11-27), the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. xxv. 31-46), the words just before the Transfiguration (Matt. xvi. 27: Mark viii. 38: Luke ix. 26), the words of our Lord before the High Priest (Matt. xxvi. 64: Mark xiv. 62: Luke xxii. 69), and one less definite utterance (Matt. xix. 28).

St. Luke gives further testimony in the Acts of the Apostles, by recording the words spoken by angels at the Ascension (Acts i. 11), by St. Peter after the healing of the lame man in the Temple (Acts iii. 19-21), and by St. Paul at Athens (Acts xvii. 31).

In St. John's Gospel, the Second Coming is referred to in Christ's last discourse, and in His last prayer with His disciples (John xiv. 3: xvii. 24), and, less definitely, in one other passage (John i. 51). In his first Epistle, St. John speaks of Christ's personal return, and identifies it, *for Christians*, with the day of judgment (1 John ii. 28: iv. 17). His fullest testimony is found in the Apocalypse, in the few verses in which he speaks in his own name.

St. Paul refers very fully to the Second Coming in three of his Epistles (1 Thess., 2 Thess., 1 Cor.), and quite definitely in six other Epistles (Rom. ii. 16: Phil. iii. 20, 21: Col. iii. 4: 1 Tim. vi. 14, 15: 2 Tim. iv. 1, 8: Titus ii. 13). The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, whether St. Paul or another, bears his testimony in two remarkable passages (Heb. ix. 28: x. 37).

St. James urges patient waiting for our Lord's return (James v. 7, 8).

St. Peter describes the Lord's return as an *epiphany* or *revelation*, which is to come like a thief, and to introduce the day of the Lord (1 Pet. i. 7, 13: 2 Pet. iii. 10, 12, 14).

St. Jude speaks of the Lord coming with His saints, to put an end to apostasy and corruption (Jude 14).

Thus every New Testament writer bears witness to the truth, that Christ will one day return, unexpectedly, in person, in power, with His saints, to set up the Kingdom which He founded at His first coming.

II. A process of education can be traced, in the attitude of the disciples towards the Second Advent.

They were not allowed to know how long the time would be before the Lord's return. That knowledge was hidden from Christ Himself, while He still shared our life on earth (Mark xiii. 32). It was hidden, for reasons that can be better understood, from the Apostles (Acts i. 7). They were to begin their difficult work in the constant expectation of Christ's return; and that expectation, to those who had lived so near His Person, and had so often seen His power, was a source of daily strength and encouragement.

Apparently the first step, in their progress towards fuller knowledge about the Second Advent, was the revelation that *an apostasy from the faith was to come first;* and that the development of the apostasy was hindered at that time by an influence that would presently be removed.

St. Paul, in his second Epistle to the Thessalonians, reminds them that he had taught these things by word of mouth, before he wrote his first Epistle (2 Tim. ii. 5, 6). His reminder has such an air of secrecy, that it is natural to suppose something was involved which could not safely be committed to writing; and early writers supply the reason. *The hindering power was the Roman government.* It would be counted treason for anyone to suggest that the Roman Empire could ever come to an end, or be removed.

The next step in the revelation of Second Advent truth is found in St. Paul's prophecy of the first Resurrection and the Rapture of the Saints, as the immediate consequences of Christ's coming (1 Thess. iv. 15-17). It was the misunderstanding of this prophecy, the idea that it *cancelled the previous revelation about the apostasy*, and so brought the Advent almost within sight, —that led St. Paul to write his reminder about the apostasy in his second Epistle to the Thessalonians (2 Thess. ii. 1-3).

Then, as the years passed by, the Apostles gradually realised that Christ would not return in their lifetime. St. Paul, who had in earlier days thought otherwise (1 Thess. iv. 17), wrote in his last Epistle that the time of his departure was at hand (2 Tim. iv. 6). St. Peter, in his last

Epistle, wrote that Christ had shown him that his death was near (2 Peter i. 14, 15). But neither St. Paul nor St. Peter ceased to proclaim the truth about the Second Advent, or to refer to it as the great object of Christian hope (2 Tim. iv. 1, 8 ; 2 Peter iii. 4, 10, 12, 14).

St. Peter is even allowed to add a new feature to the revelation of Second Advent truth. He speaks of the *day of the Lord*, introduced by His return, as associated with the burning-up of this earth, and the coming of new heavens and a new earth (2 Peter iii. 10-13). In connection with that *day*, he says that "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (2 Peter iii. 7, 8). There is here, in embryo, the truth only fully revealed thirty years later, through St. John, in the Apocalypse,—that the Second Advent would bring in a *day of the Lord*, for this world, which would last *a thousand years*, and would end in the dissolution of this material earth, and the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth, fitted to last for ever. (Compare 2 Peter iii. 3-13 ; with Rev. xx. 1-6 ; xx. 9 ; xxi. 1, 2.)

The Apocalypse, in this as in other matters of Christian prophecy, is complete and final. In it, the Second Coming is often spoken of, but only once "signified" ; and then it is in its right place (Rev. xix). It was not for the Apostles to know the times and seasons (Acts i. 7 ; where the stress, in the original Greek, is upon the words "*for you*") ; it may none the less be given to those who live in the last crisis to do so. Those who study Christian prophecy aright will at least not be taken unawares by the Coming of the Lord.

III. The Second Advent, as predicted in the New Testament, is a single event, which has one aspect for believers and another for unbelievers, but *cannot be divided.*

Until quite recent times, all orthodox Christians professed a belief in one definite personal return of our Lord, which would bring the present dispensation to an end. This belief remains satisfactory and sufficient, as regards the nature of Christ's Second Coming.

About A.D. 1830, the novel suggestion was made, that Christ's return would be in two separated stages, with an interval of years between them: the first, a secret coming to take away His people; the second, a coming in manifested glory, to rule over the world.

So complete a change of view, on such an important matter as the nature of the Second Advent, may well be viewed with suspicion. The arguments put forward in its favour will be first shortly stated, and then it will be shown that there are good reasons for its rejection.

It has been urged, in support of the theory,

(1) That various analogies, connected with the Old Testament, make a division of the Second Advent into separate "phases" not improbable:

(2) That the passages describing the Second Advent fall into two classes, one making it an object of hope, the other a cause of terror.

It would be a waste of time to examine in detail the arguments which come under the first heading. No arguments from analogy, however clear, have any weight when opposed to a single plain statement of Scripture. In this case the

analogies suggested are by no means clear. The Second Advent was not revealed in the Old Testament, as distinct from the First Advent; so that the Old Testament cannot be appealed to as a witness to its nature. The way in which Noah, or Lot, was kept safe, while others perished, is no precedent to decide God's method in a future crisis, under very different conditions. The New Testament reference to Noah and to Lot is rather to the *unexpectedness* and *completeness* of the separation that will then take place, of believers from unbelievers, of the obedient from the disobedient.

The arguments under the second heading are equally unreliable. Some passages do indeed describe the Second Advent as an object of hope, while others speak of it as a cause of terror. It is both the one and the other. It has a different *aspect*, and different *consequences*, for believers and for unbelievers. That some passages describe one of these aspects more particularly, is natural enough, and is no argument for the separation of the two *aspects* by an interval of time.

The real argument on which (without being conscious of it) the advocates of a divided Second Advent rely, is that *the futurist system of interpretation has need of it.* Though it is without Scripture authority, it has been widely accepted, because it gives relief in the difficulties which are introduced by that system into the study of prophecy,—especially in connection with the Apocalypse.

That it is without Scripture authority, a comparison of the chief predictions of the Second Advent will show.

The *words used* to describe the Second Advent are three: παρούσια, ἐπιφάνεια, ἀποκάλυψις, that is, Christ's *presence*, after a time of absence; His *manifestation*, after being known only in spirit; His *revelation*, after being unseen. They are used quite indiscriminately, in connection with the various features of our Lord's return.

Thus the first word, which is used in connection with the saints' removal from earth at the Coming (1 Thess. iv. 15, 16), is used also in connection with their coming with Christ to earth (1 Thess. iii. 13). The second word is used of the Coming, as the end of probation for believers (1 Tim. vi. 14), but also of the Coming, as putting an end to the apostasy (2 Tim. ii. 8). The third word is used of the Coming, as an object of Christian hope (1 Cor. i. 7), but also of the Coming with the saints (2 Thess. i. 7). In one passage, the first two words are used together, —the *manifestation* of the *presence* (2 Thess. ii. 8).

The three words are used as they would be if they all related to one event. The argument from them for a divided Second Advent has in fact been given up, though they are still often used as if they were reserved in Scripture to separated "phases" of the Advent.

Further, the various aspects of the Coming are *equally* associated with its *unexpectedness*. It is to come without warning, *as a thief*, or *as a trap*. This is said of the Advent, as an object of hope (1 Thess. v. 4-6), but also of the Advent, when regarded as a cause of terror (1 Thess. v. 2, 3): and in each case the Advent is made to be the same thing as the coming of the *day of*

the Lord, which is the expression used also by St. Peter when speaking of the end of this age (2 Pet. iii. 10), and describing it as coming like a thief. The phrase, *as a thief*, cannot be intended to suggest the *taking away* of believers, for in one passage the phrase, *as a trap*, is used as meaning the same thing (Luke xxi. 35). The only thing common to the two phrases is *unexpectedness.*

Thus no argument for a division of the Second Advent into "phases" can be found in the use of special words, or in the unexpectedness of the Lord's return.

Nor can any argument be derived from the fact that the saints are caught up to meet Christ as He comes, and yet come to earth with Him. The word used for the meeting is ἀπάντησις, and in the only other passages of the New Testament in which it occurs, it means *meeting and accompanying a person on his way.* It is used of the Virgins in the parable, who simply joined the bridegroom's procession, which did not stop or wait for them (Matt. xxv. 6): and of the Christians who met St. Paul outside Rome, and gave him a welcome (Acts xxviii. 15). The procession of guards and prisoners certainly did not stop: the Christians simply joined it on its way. *This is exactly what is predicted of the Second Coming.*

The division of the Second Advent into "phases" is thus seen to have no Scripture authority. It has none the less become a popular belief; and the real reason for this, as has already been pointed out, is to be found in the relief it gives in the difficulties created by futurist interpretation.

By taking literally prophecies which are expressed in the language of Eastern symbolism, and then (as a consequence) failing to recognise their fulfilment in past history, futurists find so many terrors left to precede the Lord's return, that it ceases to be an object of hope—unless Christian people are to be first of all removed from the earth, to be with Christ in a place of safety. The *interval* which is supposed to follow that removal, is to include all the terrors described in the Apocalypse—now largely, though not wholly, past: as well as the last three and a half years of Daniel's Seventy Weeks, which were fulfilled long ago in Jewish history.

Of this *interval*, devoted to purposeless vengeance on the part of the Almighty, Scripture knows nothing. Its acceptance is fatal to a right understanding of the Apocalypse.

The Second Advent, as predicted in Holy Scripture, is not thus complicated. It is a single epoch-making event, ending the present dispensation, bringing happiness and reward to faithful Christians, terror and destruction to wilful enemies of Christ, and a new dispensation, under changed conditions, for those who are neither the one nor the other. Its features may be set in order, together with a few references, chosen out of many, as follows :—

Christ will return in person to this earth (Acts i. 11), without previous warning (Rev. xvi. 15), in power and glory (Matt. xxiv. 30), met on His way by all His saints, raised or changed (1 Thess. iv. 16), coming with them to earth (1 Thess. iii. 13; His return will be the beginning of reward for believers (2 Tim. iv. 8), of punishment for wilful enemies (Luke xix. 27), of happiness for

those left on earth (Acts iii. 19-21), and of a spiritual reign over the earth by Christ and His saints (Matt. xix. 28), for a thousand years (Rev. xx. 4-6).

That return is the subject of the nineteenth chapter of the Apocalypse. The "glorious appearing" there described is the *immediate sequel* of the removal of the saints from earth, predicted by St. Paul. Christians, changed and caught up, find themselves with Christ, and are already in His train of glory when He appears to men on earth. The advocates of a divided Advent admit that a separate removal of the saints is not found in the Apocalypse. The number of those who make up the Christian Church is not completed, till the nineteenth chapter is reached: after that chapter, there is nothing to suggest any further addition to the Church. The Second Advent is in fact there found in its natural place in the prophetic outline of God's dealings with mankind.

NOTE E—ON ANTICHRIST.

I. St. John is the only New Testament writer who uses the word ἀντίχριστος: and he does not use it in the Apocalypse. The question arises,—Is there in the Apocalypse any evil power corresponding with the Antichrist of St. John's Epistles?

The word is used by St. John as of something already familiar: there is no suggestion of a new revelation. "As ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists" (1 John ii. 18). It is natural to suppose that the allusion is to the prophecy of the Man of Sin,

given many years before, through St. Paul (2 Thess. ii. 3). St. John's purpose is to recall his readers from things future to the realisation of present dangers. To him, every false teacher is an antichrist; and he uses the expressions, *the antichrist*, *the liar*, *the deceiver*, generically, as including all apostates from the faith (1 John ii. 22, 23). When he returns to the subject, in a later chapter, it is only to repeat more definitely what he has said already. "Every spirit which confesseth not Jesus is not of God: and this is (the spirit) of the antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already" (1 John iv. 3). So also in the second Epistle: "Many deceivers are gone forth into the world, even they that confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist" (2 John 7).

St. John was evidently anxious to discourage any idea of a future personal antichrist, more wicked or more powerful than those who already answered to the name.

His attitude is explained by what is known of the ideas of the early Church as to the future. The early Christians, to whom is due the conception of a personal antichrist, knew nothing of the long centuries that lay before the Christian Church. To them everything future was foreshortened, and an individual antichrist, who should combine in his own person all the features of predicted evil, was in keeping with their limited outlook. They had not, like the Apostles, the gift of inspiration, to keep them from mistakes.

Had we only to deal with what St. John says about antichrist, the problem would be easy.

To him, every false teacher is antichrist: antichrist had come even in his day.

II. But the word was taken up by the early Church, and applied to a personal incarnation of evil, who was to come in the last days: a kind of antithesis to Jesus Christ. The Antichrist was to fulfil all the more definite predictions of evil, such as those of the Man of Sin, the Beast in the Apocalypse, the Wilful King in Daniel, and even the Prince in the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks.

This crowding of all the prophecies of evil to come, into one short period, connected with so fearful a being, was the natural result of the foreshortening to which reference has been made. The early Church could not realise, as we can now, the slow development of God's purposes in the world: and that "the last days" was only another name for a dispensation lasting perhaps two thousand years, and filled from end to end with conflict.

The future *personal* Antichrist of the early Church has no place in the Apocalypse. The enemies of Christ are there described under Wild-beast symbols, and such symbols are never used of individuals, in symbolic prophecy.[1] They are world-powers, not persons: they succeed one another: and their activity is not confined to the end, though it reaches to it.

If there is indeed to be, in the future, so terrible an incarnation of evil, the fact must surely

[1] See Note F.—It is no exception to this rule, that Christ is seen as a Lamb: for a lamb is not a wild beast, and the figure is distinctly connected with the sacrifice of a real lamb at the Passover Feast.

find a place in a prophecy so complete and systematic as the Apocalypse.

III. The end of this age may, none the less, be preceded by the antichristian activities of a powerful ruler, who shall trample for a time (as Napoleon did) on the political and religious liberties of Christendom. What is said about the Image of the Beast, in the thirteenth chapter, may be a prediction of such a tyranny. But the tyrant himself would be no more worthy of personal mention in prophecy than Napoleon was. The first four Vials, though their subject is the Napoleonic period, make no reference to Napoleon himself. And such a tyrant as has been described would no more than Napoleon deserve the title of "the Antichrist."

Used as St. John uses it, the word applies to every enemy of Christ, but more particularly to the three world-powers which specially oppose Him—the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet. Each is made up of many individuals: each is in turn Satan's agent against Christ: and associated with each are the names of men of special ability or special wickedness, who have been leaders in hostility to the saints of God.

NOTE F—ON WILD-BEAST SYMBOLISM.

God has chosen to make use of Wild-beast symbolism, in predicting the destinies of nations. Only those nations which come into direct contact with the people of Israel, or with the development of the Christian Church, appear in prophecy. They are there symbolised by Wild-beasts, mythical in character, whose heads, horns,

wings, and other features, have a symbolic meaning. By means of these symbols, their conflicts and their transformations, the history of empires is rapidly and vividly outlined : and the vision is in most cases followed by an inspired interpretation. The only questions that can arise, for the Christian student, are questions of historical identification, and of the meaning of details.

Wild-beast symbolism, as above described, is confined to two Books,—Daniel and the Apocalypse. Elsewhere in the Bible, Wild-beast figures are used by way of simile or parable, but not for prediction.

It forms, in these two Books, a complete and connected whole, extending, without a break, from the days of Nebuchadnezzar to the time of our Lord's return. It is thus the most natural starting-point for the study of Christian Prophecy.

Associated with it, in the Book of Daniel, is Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the Great Image, which predicts under other figures the same world-powers, and the effect upon them of the coming of Christ.

In studying the inspired interpretations which follow these visions, it is necessary to give particular attention to the use they make of the words *king* and *kingdom*. The two words are used in exactly the same sense ; the *king* representing the *power of the kingdom*, in accordance with old ideas of monarchy, which survive in a modified form to this day.

Used in this way, the word *king* is official, and not personal. Only once in connection with these visions is it used of an individual, and then

the fact is plainly stated. Interpreting the vision of the Ram and the He-goat, the angel says: "The rough goat is the king of Greece, and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power." (Dan. viii. 21, 22.)

Here it is evident (1) that the *king of Greece* means the *kingdom of Greece*, while the *first king* means an individual ruler, Alexander the Great; (2) that a *beast* in this case stands for a *kingdom* or ruling power, a *horn* for an individual king; (3) that the *four horns* that follow are not individual kings, but *kingdoms* arising from the break-up of the Greek Empire; (4) that the great *horn* is used of Alexander personally, because the Empire which he founded broke up at his death; he was its only ruler.

The two verses are a valuable key to the correct interpretation of Wild-beast symbolism, which has for its subject the destinies of empires, and not the doings of individuals. *Beasts* represent great world-powers, *horns*, the lesser world-powers which spring from them.

The other visions bear this out. The four Beasts seen by Daniel are first said to be four *kings*, and then the fourth Beast is said to be a fourth *kingdom* (Dan. vii. 17, 23). Here the two words are evidently used with the same meaning: "four kings" does not mean four individual rulers, but four kingdoms.

In the same way, the king is identified with the kingly power, in connection with the Great Image. To Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel says, "*Thou* art the head of gold"; but he imme-

diately adds, "after thee shall arise another *kingdom* inferior to *thee;* and another third *kingdom* of brass" (Dan. ii. 38, 39.) The king and the kingdom are one.

So much is this the case, that whereas in the Great Image, the first power is called a *king*, and the other three, *kingdoms;* in the case of the four Beasts, which symbolise the same four Empires, the four powers are all called *kings*, and only the fourth, a *kingdom*.

When, therefore, the ten horns on the fourth Beast are said to represent ten *kings*, while the four horns on the He-goat are said to represent four *kingdoms*, no distinction can be made (Dan. vii. 24; viii. 22). If the one prediction is non-personal, so also is the other; for the two symbols exactly correspond with one another, one of them predicting the break-up of the Western, the other that of the Eastern Empire; and in each case a *little horn*, arising among the others, is described as representing a *king*. No support for the idea of a personal Antichrist can be found in these visions.

In the Apocalypse, the Wild-beast symbols are fewer, but more complicated. The locust-horsemen of the fifth and sixth Trumpets need not here be considered; they stand apart, and have already been fully dealt with. The second Beast, or False Prophet, is a separate symbol, and has been fully considered. The four Living Creatures are connected only with the Cherubim, and represent the orders of creation.

There remains only the ten-horned Beast, in its three forms, one of which is a Dragon-form (Rev. xii. 13, 17). It is evidently the same as the fourth Beast of Daniel's vision, as the ten

horns and their interpretation indicate; but it has many new features, and it passes through several transformations.

Its *horns*, as in Daniel, symbolise ten kingdoms, into which it breaks up. Its *heads*, now seen as seven, are said to be "kings"; but as they evidently follow one another in order, and an eighth, connected with the seven, follows them, they must be *forms of Roman government;* for only one empire is in view, and a *head* is never used of an individual ruler. Its *tail*, noticed in the first form only, is the place of nations conquered by it; the tail disappears with the loss of these conquests. Its *crowns*, seen first on the heads (Rev. xii. 3) then on the horns (Rev. xiii. 1) then not seen at all (Rev. xvii. 3), show the distribution of power; first central and imperial; then, divided among ten kingdoms; and finally, lost to a *woman-rider*, that is to say, to a *Church*, which has attained supreme authority. The symbol retains its form to the end; but in the last condition the heads are all fallen from power, the woman having taken their place of rule; and in the end the *horns*, having now a separate existence, attack and despoil the woman, whom they have long supported. The Beast itself (the *power that rules from Rome* being in this case the kingdom of Italy) takes part in this attack. At that point the symbolism ends.

In the twentieth century, the fulfilment of the whole of this complicated prophecy stands revealed: surely an evidence of the nearness of the Lord's return.

The fourth Beast of Daniel's vision includes the three forms of the Beast in the Apocalypse, and like those figures, it looks far into the future

for it pictures the coming of the Lord, and the victory of the saints—which are the subject of the nineteenth and twentieth chapters of the Apocalypse.

The four Empires of prophecy, which form the subject of Wild-beast symbolism, and of the Great Image, were identified long ago. The words written by Hippolytus, in the early part of the third century, while the Roman Empire was at its strongest, are remarkably clear and correct. He says: "The golden head of the image, and the lioness, denoted the Babylonians; the shoulders and arms of silver, and the bear, represented the Persians and Medes; the belly and thighs of brass, and the leopard, meant the Greeks, who held the sovereignty from Alexander's time; the legs of iron, and the beast dreadful and terrible, expressed the Romans, who hold the sovereignty at present; the toes of the feet, which were part clay and part iron, and the ten horns, were emblems of the kingdoms that are yet to rise; the other little horn that grows up among them meant the Antichrist in their midst; the stone that smites the earth and brings judgment upon the world was Christ."[1]

Since these words were written, the Roman Empire has disappeared, and in its place there are ten kingdoms, more or less, and have been for many centuries. In the midst of them, the Papal power has arisen, tyrannised and declined: its decline being connected with the independent action of the ten kingdoms, which now include Italy. And the kingdom of the Stone, which is the same thing as the ascendancy of Christianity,

[1] *Christ and Antichrist*, sec. 28.

has been established over the fragments of the old Roman Empire, whose dissolution has been rightly attributed to "the intrusion of Christianity, and the advent of the barbarian;"[1] in other words, to the Stone striking the image on the feet, and to the clay which made them brittle.

All these things were predicted long ago either in the Wild-beast symbolism of Daniel and the Apocalypse, or in the dream of the Great Image.

NOTE G—ON TIME SYMBOLISM.

Wild-beast symbols form a class by themselves: so also do the symbols that relate to *time*. Many expositors overlook these altogether, though it is evident that if measures of time are included in a symbolic prophecy, they are likely to be themselves symbolic. "A time, and times, and the dividing of time," for example, can only be a symbol (Dan. vii. 25). It is not expressed in the ordinary way, and it occurs in the midst of symbolism. It has to be *interpreted*, even if it means nothing more than "three years and a half."

The Old Testament contains many examples of time-symbolism. In Joseph's history there are four examples. Cows, and ears of corn, symbolise *years;* baskets, and vine-branches, are symbols of *days*. In these cases, the symbols are not naturally connected with time. They could not have been understood, before the event, without inspired interpretation. After the event, their *fulfilment* would have provided a key to their meaning.

Another kind of time-symbolism is found in

[1] Masterman, *Condition of England.*

Scripture, in which natural time-symbols are used: one unit of time being used as a symbol for another—a day for a year. By this means, a statement is veiled in uncertainty, but uncertainty of a kind which suits God's purpose, and man's infirmity. A time-prediction may be thus given, quite definite in length, but *sealed* to all who are not willing to accept the guidance of Scripture analogy: and interpreted fully only by the event. The doubt about the unit intended prevents the student of prophecy from making himself a prophet; and this also is in accordance with God's plan.

Passages in the Book of Numbers, in Ezekiel, and in Daniel, compel the reader of the Old Testament to recognise this particular symbolism. The forty years of Israel's wandering in the desert are represented as the punishment for forty days of faithless spying in the land of Canaan (Num. xiv. 34), "for every day a year." Again, Ezekiel is directed to lie 390 days on his left side for Israel's sin, and 40 days on his right side for Judah's sin, in each case *a day for a year* (Ezek. iv. 4-6). Here a day is definitely made to *represent* a year: for the punishment was not really borne by Ezekiel, but was symbolically represented by his actions.

These two instances are enough to prove that God uses a *day* as a symbol for a *year*, in the utterances of the prophets: but neither of them has to do with prediction. To complete the argument for year-day symbolism, it is necessary to point to a clear instance of the use of days for years, in the prediction of events.

The prophecy of the Seventy Weeks, given to Daniel, is such an instance (Dan. ix. 24-27).

An angel reveals to him the future of his people, in connection with the coming of Messiah. He tells him that "seventy weeks" are measured off, from a certain decree of restoration, to the days of Messiah.

The Hebrew word *Shabuim*, used here for *weeks*, is *the only word* so used, though its primary meaning is *sevens*. It is nowhere else used in the Bible except as meaning *seven-day periods*. The Hebrew reader would take that to be the meaning: and it is so taken in both the Greek and the Latin translations,—the Septuagint[1] and the Vulgate. In the only passage where *sevens* and not weeks are intended (Gen. vii. 2, 3), the Hebrew has a different word, a numeral twice repeated, and the Greek and Latin translations follow the Hebrew by using a repeated number, —ἕπτα ἕπτα, *septena septena*.

The word here used for *week* is indeed occasionally followed by another word, *of days;* but that is not the common usage, and only adds emphasis. The Hebrew words for *month* and *year* are used in exactly the same way: that is, generally alone, but sometimes, for emphasis, with *of days* added. The English translation notes the difference by translating in such cases, *three full weeks* (Dan. x. 2), the *space of a month* (Gen. xxix. 14), a *whole month* (Num. xi. 20, 21), *two full years* (Jer. xxviii. 3).

It is perfectly clear that the time named in the prophecy is seventy weeks, of 490 days: and it is

[1] That is, Theodotion's translation, which has taken the place of the original Septuagint translation. Some Futurist writers speak of the Seventy Weeks as "Heptads" or "Sevens". But the Septuagint translates them "Hebdomads" or "Weeks," not "Heptads" or "Sevens."

equally clear that the prophecy was fulfilled on the scale of years, *a day for a year*. This would never have been questioned, by Christians, but for the proof it affords, that in symbolic prophecy *days* are used as symbols of *years*,—a principle which strongly supports the historical interpretation of Christian prophecy.

Such symbolism represents a mode of thought common enough in the Old Testament. The instances which have been quoted are found in three separate Books, and in surroundings which have nothing else in common. Even in the early days in which Jacob lived, it was natural for Laban to appoint seven years of service, in view of the seven-day marriage-festival that was to be the reward (Gen. xxix. 27, 28 : compare Judg. xiv. 12).

In the Apocalypse some of the time-measures are evidently symbolic, and must be interpreted on the year-day scale suggested by Old Testament usage.

The most important of these is a period of three and a half years, which is *never so* described, though it is mentioned seven times. It appears in three different forms, all of them unusual. It is three times expressed as a *time, times, and a half*, or, *the dividing of time* (Dan. vii, 25 : xii. 7 : Rev. xii. 14) : twice as *forty-two months* (Rev. xi. 2 : xiii. 5) : and twice as *twelve hundred and sixty days* (Rev. xi. 3 : xii. 6). It is obviously a symbol ; and the various forms in which it is expressed show that it makes use of artificial years of 360 days, made up of 12 equal months of 30 days each : as might be expected when a year is used as a symbol.

The period is that of (1) the dominance of the

Western "Little Horn" (Dan. vii. 25): (2) the dominance of the Beast (Rev. xiii. 5): (3) the witnessing in sackcloth of Christ's two Witnesses (Rev. xi. 3): the special danger to Israel (Rev. xii. 6, 14): (5) the profanation of the Holy City (Rev. xi. 2): and (6) more generally, the time of the end (Dan. xii. 7).

The first two of these may be taken as identical: the third and fourth are directly connected with them: but the fifth is apparently a separate matter, connected with the East, not the West; and the last is indeterminate, on account of the vagueness of the context.

If so long a period as twelve hundred and sixty years of Christian history is symbolised, and such different matters are included, it can hardly be supposed that a single beginning and a single ending, accurately separated from one another, are to be looked for: but rather a series of beginnings, leading to a series of endings, some of which can be identified, and may possibly be exact. Mathematical precision is by no means essential in such a case. These beginnings and endings will mark out an opening and a closing period of some length, which will be the times of rise and of decline of the power predicted.

Assuming that the Papacy is the power indicated, two remarkable measurements are noticeable. The first is from Cyprian to Luther, A.D. 257 to A.D. 1517, and relates to doctrine; the second, from Phocas to Victor Emmanuel, A.D. 610 to A.D. 1870, and relates to political ascendancy: each is 1260 years.

The Papal authority is based upon Church monopoly, salvation being made dependent on

churchmanship, and that on communion with "an Apostolic see." This theory was gradually developed, and was first completely expressed in Cyprian's writings, which may be dated A.D. 257, the year before he died. Cyprian was at the same time the last champion of doctrinal independence of the Roman Bishop: all rivalry after his time being confined to that between Old and New Rome, that is, between Rome and Constantinople.

The ascendancy of the doctrine was not effectually challenged until Luther put up his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the Church at Wittemberg in A.D. 1517, and so, as all historians agree, started the Reformation.

There are additional reasons for the choice of these two dates, as fulfilling prophecy.

In the year 257, Cyprian had a dream, in which he was promised the respite of a *day* from impending martyrdom. He actually had the respite of a *year*, exactly. His deacon, who records the story, remarks upon the symbolism of a day for a year, as in accordance with Scripture usage; as natural when found in connection with things future; and as keeping expectation alive, till verified by the event.[1] Thus at the beginning of the earliest period to which the year-day symbolism seems to apply, the attention of the Christian world is directed to it, by a dream and its fulfilment, and by a plain statement of its scriptural character, and of its definite purpose.

The year 1517 is marked out as clearly, though in a different way. The fifth Lateran

[1] Pontius, *Life of Cyprian*, sec. 13.

Council was held at Rome from A.D. 1512 to A.D. 1517. Its orators vied with one another in applying to the Pope all the attributes of Christ, and to the Papal Church those of the New Jerusalem.[1] It was so successful in silencing all opposition, that the orator of the ninth session was able to declare solemnly the complete triumph of the Papal Church. All opposition was ended; the world was united in subjection to the Pope. That was in May, 1514; and the Council, after further sessions marked by the same spirit, separated in 1517, with mutual congratulations. Before the close of that year, on October 31st, Luther posted up his Theses at Wittemburg; his challenge found an echo all over Christendom; and the Reformation began. God's two Witnesses, the Old and New Testaments, after being *slain* for three and a half years (a day for a year, Rev. xi. 7-11) came to life again, and were soon accorded a place of honour, such as they had never had before, among the nations.

The three centuries that followed the death of Cyprian, saw the gradual development of the Papal power, from doctrinal monopoly to political ascendancy; until, about A.D. 606, an imperial decree set aside the last and most formidable rival of the Pope,—the Patriarch of Constantinople. This decree "has been questioned," but is sufficiently attested by two Latin historians[2], and explains, as nothing else could, the base

[1] Elliott shows this by abundant quotations from the records, *Horæ Apoc.* ii. 442, 443.

[2] Paulus Diaconus, and Anastasius: quoted by Elliott, *Horæ Apoc.* iii. 163.

flattery lavished by the Pope of that day on a scoundrel and a murderer who had usurped the imperial throne. By the death of the Emperor Phocas, in A.D. 610, the decree became an assured possession of the Pope. Twelve hundred and sixty years later, in A.D. 1870, the Pope lost his temporal Power, and with it the city of Rome. And the three centuries which separated Luther's Theses from that date, were marked by a gradual decline of the world-power of the Papacy.

These four dates, as examples of beginnings and endings of the 1260 year period, must suffice, for this is not a book of history.

Two other time symbols appear in the Book; the *five months* of the fifth Trumpet (Rev. ix. 5, 10), and the *day, month, and year* of the sixth Trumpet (Rev. ix. 15).

The first of these is the natural time for locust-ravages; but it is twice mentioned, as if used with a special meaning, which cannot well be literal. Taking it to mean 150 years, a day for a year, it expresses the limit of Saracen aggression, as a conquering power.

The second, which measures the time between the setting free of the power from the Euphrates, and the death of *the third* of men through its agency, is 391 days. From the accession of Alp Arslan, the first conquering Moslem Sultan, in A.D. 1063, to the taking of Constantinople by the Turks in A.D. 1453, is 390 years, as reckoned in the Western way. But it is permissible to count an Eastern period in an Eastern way, that is, inclusively, and make it 391 years. The *three days* in the grave are thus reckoned, and the *eight days* which, to the Jewish mind, describe a week (Matt. xii. 40: Luke ix. 28).

There remain only three time-measures in the Book, and they are not symbolic.

There is the Thousand years, in the twentieth chapter, which is so expressed, and found in so literal a context, that it is best to take it literally. There is the frequent use of the word *hour*, either (as *the hour*) expressing the *precise moment* of an event (Rev. iii. 3; ix. 15; xiv. 7); or (as *one hour*) a short but unmeasured space of time (Rev. xvii. 12; xviii. 10, 17, 19). Finally, there is the "silence in heaven, about the space of half-an-hour," which follows the opening of the seventh Seal. It is a short pause in the heaven of the vision, giving a breathing space to the Church on earth, before the Trumpets bring their terrors upon it (Rev. viii. 1).

NOTE H—ON THE SYMBOLISM OF NUMBERS.

The Apocalypse contains many numbers, and the most superficial study of the Book suggests that some of them are used in a peculiar way, as attached to certain objects.

In other parts of the Bible, numbers are sometimes so used. Thus *four* is used in connection with *created nature:* there are four Cherubim, four corners of the earth, four winds. In other passages, *four* is associated with the symbolism of the Greek or Eastern Empire: there are four heads, four wings, four horns. *Ten* is associated in the same way with the Roman or Western Empire: there are ten toes, specially mentioned, on the Great Image, and ten horns, specially interpreted, on the fourth

Wild-beast. *Twelve* is throughout the Bible the number attached to Israel.

In the Apocalypse, these three numbers, *four*, *ten*, and *twelve*, are found in the same connection : and to them is added the number *seven*, which is used quite definitely as associated with *the Christian dispensation.*

To press the symbolism of numbers into greater detail, as many writers have done, is to become fanciful, and to leave the solid ground of Scripture usage. This may be studied by reference to the passages indicated below.

For the number *four*, as the number of *creation*, there are the *Cherubim* of Ezekiel, with which the number is eleven times associated (Ezek. i. 1-18) : the *Living Creatures* in the Apocalypse, which are closely connected with the Cherubim, and are seven times associated with the number *four* (Rev. iv. 6, 8 : v. 14 : vi. 6 : xiv. 3 : xv. 7 : xix. 4) : the *four winds* commonly spoken of (Ezek. xxxvii. 9 : Matt. xxiv. 31), and specially appearing as symbols in Daniel's vision of the four Beasts (Dan. vii. 2), and in the Apocalypse (Rev. vii. 1) : and the *four corners of the earth*, expressing, according to the ideas of earlier days, its whole extent (Isa. xi. 12 : Ezek. vii. 2 : Rev. vii. 1).

For the number *four*, used in connection with the Greek or Eastern Empire, there is the third Beast of Daniel's vision, with its four wings, and four heads (Dan. vii. 6), and, in another symbol, its four horns (Dan. viii. 8, 22) : with a further reference in Dan. xi. 4 : and the voice from the four horns of the altar, which sets free the four angels from the Euphrates, to destroy the Eastern Empire (Rev. ix. 13-15). For the

number *seven*, as associated with the Christian dispensation, there are many references. The Holy Spirit is symbolised in the Apocalypse by *seven lamps of fire*, representing the *seven spirits of God* (Rev. iv. 5): and this dispensation is the dispensation of the Spirit. The Christian Church is itself symbolised by *seven Churches*, as representing all the rest (Rev. i. 11), and by seven separate *candlesticks* (Rev. i. 12, 20); the rulers of the Church are represented by *seven stars* (Rev. i. 16, 20). The consequences of Christ's work are revealed in a Scroll sealed with *seven seals* (Rev. v. 1). Christ Himself is symbolised as a Lamb with *seven horns*, indicating power, and *seven eyes*, indicating His gift of the Holy Spirit (Rev. v. 6). A series of *seven symbols* are allotted to each of the three periods of Christianity. *Seven angels* sound the Trumpets (Rev. viii. 2): *seven angels* pour out the Vials (Rev. xv. 1: xvi. 1). And when the Christian dispensation is ended by the return of Christ as Conqueror (Rev. xix. 11), the number seven disappears from the prophecy, except for one reference to an earlier chapter (Rev. xxi. 9).

The addition of *seven heads* to the figure, found in the Book of Daniel, of the Roman Empire, indicates that in the Apocalypse its history is *confined to the Christian period.* (Compare Dan. vii. 7 with Rev. xii. 3: xiii. 1: and xvii. 3).

Thus *seven* is seen to be *the number of the Christian Church*, throughout the Apocalypse.

For the number *ten*, as used of the Roman or Western Empire, there are the two prophecies in the Book of Daniel; the first conveying a hint of *tenfold division* (it is no more than a hint), by

the separate mention of the toes of the Image (Dan. ii. 42), the second describing and specially interpreting the *ten horns* on the Beast (Dan. vii. 7, 20, 24). There are also, in the Apocalypse, the three forms of the same ten-horned Beast (Rev. xii. 3 : xiii. 1 : xvii. 3, 12-17).

For the number *twelve*, as the number of Israel, there is very complete evidence. The number is prominent throughout Israel's history, from the time of the *twelve patriarchs*. The *twelve tribes* were always so called, though Ephraim and Manasseh were counted as distinct. Levi, most privileged of all, was not counted, lest the number should be marred : and in the Apocalypse, Dan is omitted rather than Levi, since one must be left out (Rev. vii. 7). The number is prominent in the details of Israel's history. The *twelve stones* in the breastplate (Exod. xxviii. 21) : the *twelve stones* taken out of Jordan (Josh. iv. 8) : and the *twelve stones* of Elijah's altar on Carmel (1 Kings xviii. 31) were all connected with the *twelve tribes*, whom even the Jews of our Lord's time claimed to represent (Acts xxvi. 7 : James i. 1). The number *twelve* is very prominent in the Apocalypse, but it is absent from those passages which are marked with the number *seven*. The sealing of Israel is of twelve tribes, twelve thousand of each (Rev. vii.). The number does not occur again, until Israel's privilege and punishment are the subject of the vision : and then the symbol for Israel has a crown of *twelve stars* (Rev. xii. 1). It occurs once more, when the sealed tribes are seen for a moment, safe : their number, as before, 144,000 (Rev. xiv. 1, 3). But when the Church-period is ended, Israel, "grafted

again into its own olive-tree," takes precedence of the Church. The Holy City has twelve gates, twelve foundations, a length and breadth of twelve thousand furlongs; its walls are 144 cubits high. There are twelve angels, twelve precious stones, twelve pearls, twelve names of Apostles: everything is marked with *the number of Israel* (Rev. xxi.).

The number of the Elders, twenty-four, is found only in that connection, but it suggests the twenty-four courses of the old priesthood, and thus helps towards the interpretation of the symbol.[1]

The number 666 is not so much a symbol, as an enigma, which the reader is challenged to solve (Rev. xiii. 18).

The *third part*, the *fourth part*, the *tenth part* are the subject of a separate Note.

NOTE I—ON "THE THIRD PART."

Three phrases, translated in the English Version, *the third part*, *the fourth part*, *the tenth part*, are used in a peculiar way in the Apocalypse, and have given much trouble to expositors.

They are ordinal numbers only; τό τρίτον, τό τέταρτον, τό δέκατον. The word *part* is not in the Greek, but has been put in by the translators.

They may refer either to *order* or to *division*. In the New Testament they are used many times in their ordinary meaning. *The tenth* is thus used twice, *the fourth* six times, *the third*

[1] Rev. iv. 10: 1 Chron. xxiv. 1-19.

more than thirty times. In every case they refer to *order*, and not to *division* into parts.

They appear in the symbolic language of the Apocalypse, in a way which suggests some special purpose. *The third* is thus used fifteen times, *the fourth* and *the tenth*, once. The use of *the fourth* provides a clue, and suggests that all three expressions are used in this prophecy as *identifying marks*. Other numbers are certainly so used in the Apocalypse, as is shown in the Note on the Symbolism of Numbers.

The persecution predicted under the fourth Trumpet is limited to *the fourth* of the earth. Its fulfilment was, as a matter of history, limited to the area of *the Roman Empire*. Christianity, which had suffered many local persecutions, was finally placed under the ban of the Empire, and declared to be an illegal religion, wherever Rome ruled.

The Roman Empire was *the fourth* of the great Empires, which were predicted in the Vision of the Great Image, and in the later Vision of the Four Wild Beasts, in the Book of Daniel (Dan. ii. 40: vii. 23). It undoubtedly appears again in the Apocalypse, in Wild-beast forms closely connected with Daniel's Vision.

It is therefore natural to conclude, that "*the fourth* of the earth" is intended to mean the Roman Empire, the fourth of the Empires of prophecy: and that *the third* is used in the same way, of the third or Greek Empire (Dan. ii. 39: vii. 6). When it is prefixed, as in the first four Trumpets, to a number of objects on which plagues are inflicted, it is an *identifying mark*, connecting them with the Greek or Eastern Empire.

This interpretation may be first tested by applying it to the Dragon described in the twelfth chapter.

The Dragon is the Pagan Roman Empire, acting as Satan's agent against Christ and Christianity. His tail is said to draw *the third* of the stars of heaven, having cast them down to earth.

Stars are symbols for those in authority: lesser powers, as compared with the central authority, which is represented by the sun. A fall from heaven to earth symbolises the loss of power by defeat. The tail is the symbol of subjection (Deut. xxviii. 13, 44), the symbol of inferiority (Isa. ix. 14, 15), the place of the conquered.

The interpretation of the symbol will then be as follows:—the Pagan Roman Empire, at the time indicated, which is the time of the birth of Christ, has conquered the rulers of the countries which went to make up the old Greek Empire. The description, which (for five verses only) is not prophetical, but historical, corresponds exactly with the facts. The Roman Empire had gradually conquered the Eastern princes, and reduced them to the condition of vassals: and Christ was born within the Roman Empire only because Judea had been thus annexed sixty years before His birth. The conquest of *the third* of the stars by the Dragon is only introduced for that reason.

Thus the interpretation suggested by the fourth Seal, is confirmed by the description of the Dragon, in the twelfth chapter. It applies equally to the more difficult case of the Trumpets, in which the expression, *the third*, occurs fourteen times.

In the case of the first four Trumpets, and of the sixth, each of the objects on which plagues fall (except the green grass) is marked with the expression, *the third.* The fifth Trumpet has no such mark.

The first four Trumpets are a prediction of four waves of Barbarian invasion, which fell upon the whole Roman world, East as well as West, and brought the Western Empire to an end. The sixth Trumpet is a prediction of the rise and destiny of the Turkish Empire, which troubled the whole Roman world, West as well as East, and brought the Eastern Empire to an end. As the Roman Empire was the power concerned, why is the mark *the third*, and not *the fourth?*

The answer to this question is quite clear, and shows the historical accuracy of the predictions of the Apocalypse.

Immediately after the sixth Seal was fulfilled, and before the first Trumpet, the Roman Empire completely changed its character. It had become Christian: it went on to become Eastern.[1] The Emperor who ruled from Rome became an Emperor in name only. He was subject to the ruler of a revived Greek Empire set up at Constantinople. The first four Trumpets brought enemies upon an Empire which had become Eastern or Greek, in capital as well as in character, and which is therefore correctly described in the Apocalypse as *the third*, and not *the fourth.* This change of character is freely admitted by historians. It was noted, long before it happened, in the accurate predictions of sacred prophecy.

[1] This change of character began under Diocletian, who preceded Constantine. The latter completed it.

The revived Greek Empire had lost the whole of the West, but it survived for nearly a thousand years. Its "death" was brought about at last by the Turks, who fulfilled the prediction of the sixth Trumpet, and "slew *the third* of men;" that is, put an end to the third or Greek Empire, in its revived, Roman form.

In the case of the fifth Trumpet, the phrase, *the third*, does not occur. History shows the reason. Mohammed launched upon the world a new religion, which by its early conquests affected Asia and Africa more than Europe. The Saracens never seriously threatened the Greek Empire, and in the West they only succeeded in occupying, for a time, a part of Spain. The Empire, as such, was not the object of successful attack.

Once only in the Apocalypse, *the tenth* is used in a way that calls for interpretation. The statement is made that as a result of Reformation movements "*the tenth* of the city fell." The city is Rome, as representing the Papal power: that power was to be derived from ten kingdoms, and the fall of one of them from obedience may well be intended.

The corresponding event in history would seem to be the loss of England, under Henry VIII., to the Papal power.

Thus the use of the three expressions, *the third*, *the fourth*, and *the tenth*, is reasonably explained, and strong confirmation is indirectly obtained of the truth and accuracy of the interpretation offered in this commentary.

As used in connection with the Trumpets, *the third* may have (like the seven heads of the Beast) a second meaning, and may thus limit

the application of the visions in which it occurs, not only in their *scope*, which is the Empire, not the world ; and in their *time*, which is that of the later, not the earlier Empire ; but also in their *destructiveness*, which is partial, not complete : affecting, in the case of the first four Trumpets, the West more than the East ; and in the case of the sixth Trumpet, the East more than the West.

NOTE J—ON "THE SEVEN THUNDERS."

It is in accordance with the common use of figurative language, that "the Seven Thunders" (Rev. x. 3) should be the thunders of Papal anathema. To Luther himself, this seemed the natural interpretation.

Thus in his *Antichrist Revealed*, he says : "Terrible as the lightning and the thunder, fulminatory Bulls and anathemas impended over the heads of those who incurred pontifical displeasure" (*Engl. Trans.* p. 47).

And in his *Table-talk*, he says that the Decretals of the Roman Church "are the seven thunders of Papal intimidation in Apoc. x."

So also, Silveira, a Roman Catholic expositor cited by Elliott, says : "*Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered ;* that is, the decrees, definitions, and canons, and the thunders of anathema to be hurled back in answer (*retorquenda*) against heretics (*Horae Apoc.* ii. 113).

Neither Luther nor Silveira is here quoted as an authority on the interpretation of the passage. The one was too closely concerned with the events predicted : the other could only adopt the Roman Catholic standpoint. They are quoted

merely as showing that the figure of the Seven Thunders naturally suggested the idea of Papal anathema, to men of their day.

Many other illustrations are given by Elliott in his commentary on the Apocalypse. One in particular, from an Irish Roman Catholic Journal of A.D. 1848, illustrates more modern usage: "Rome, the capital of the Christian world, now takes her proper place at the head of universal development: and from her seven hills seven thunders utter their voices, proclaiming that liberty and religion are henceforth inseparable" (*Horae Apoc.* ii. 114).

Thus the figure of *thunder* suggests, to Protestant and Roman Catholic alike, the style and contents of Papal decrees: and if, in the Apocalypse, the Papal power is represented under the figure of a *seven-headed* Wild Beast, what could be more natural than that its utterances should be described as *seven thunders uttering their voices?*

That the voices are *hostile* to that of the angel, and an answer to it, is suggested by the wording of the original, which puts emphasis on the word for *their:* "the seven thunders uttered *their* voices."

That they are not authorised, or not true, is suggested by the definite veto: *write them not.* For in each of the three places, where, in the predictive part of the Apocalypse, St. John is *told to write,* the reason given or suggested is, that what he is to write is *true.*

He is to pronounce a special blessing on those "who die in the Lord," because the Spirit *confirms* the blessing (Rev. xiv. 13). He is to do the same in the case of those "who are called

to the Marriage Supper," because "these are the *true sayings* of God" (Rev. xix. 9). He is to write down words he has just heard about future blessing, because "these words are *true* and faithful" (Rev. xxi. 5).

The natural conclusion is that the command, *write them not*, condemns the voices of the seven thunders as *untrue*, and *not of God*. The definite article marks them as no new voices, but voices often heard before in the Christian world.

NOTE K—ON THE CHURCH AS A SUBJECT OF PROPHECY.

The Christian Church appears in Prophecy, at first in mysterious hints which predict the calling of the Gentiles, then more and more clearly, until in the last Book of the Bible a comprehensive outline is given of its troubles and its destinies.

(1) The Old Testament Prophets suggest in many passages that the Gentiles are one day to share with Israel God's special blessings. These passages were overlooked by the Jews, and even by the Apostles themselves, until Gentiles were actually admitted, by God's own authority and the gift of the Holy Ghost, into the Christian Church (Acts x). Examples are to be found in Deut. xxxii. 43: Ps. cxvii. 1: Isa. xi. 10: xlii. 1: xlix. 6: lii. 15; lxvi. 19: Jer. xvi. 19: Hos. ii. 23: Mal. i. 11.

(2) In the Book of Daniel, which contains predictions in the more definite, apocalyptic, form, the Christian Church appears as the *Kingdom of the Stone*, breaking up the Fourth Empire, and in some way succeeding it (Dan. ii. 34):

and the Christian dispensation is predicted in connection with the *Ten Horns*, and the *Little Horn* which arises among them (Dan. vii. 8). These predictions find their explanation in the Apocalypse. Neither of them can be referred to the days of the Second Coming, for the Fourth Empire was long ago broken up, and was succeeded by no other power than that of the Papacy, which (however unworthily) represented Christianity, as against heathenism.

(3) Many of the Parables of our Lord are prophecies of the Christian dispensation, and of the Second Coming as bringing it to an end. Thus the Wheat and Tares, the Draw-net, the Talents, the Pounds, the Seed growing secretly, the Great Supper, the Leaven, the Mustard-seed, and the Wicked Husbandmen,—are all predictions of the future of the earthly Church, its gradual increase and world-wide extension, its mixed membership, and its influence on the world.

(4) The Apocalypse has the Christian dispensation for its main subject. Beginning from the time of St. John, it gives an outline, marked out by critical periods, from that time to the end of all things. It gathers into one focus all earlier threads of prophecy relating to the Christian Church.

That the Church should be thus progressively predicted, is natural enough, considering its importance. That it has been so predicted, is fairly obvious, to the careful reader of the Bible. It would not be necessary to dwell upon it further, but for the views of some of those who hold a Futurist interpretation of prophecy.

They have adopted the opinion, that God's

purposes, as revealed in the Old Testament, were "suspended" by the unbelief of the Jews: that to hold any other view is to make Jewish unbelief a foregone conclusion: and that the Christian dispensation, being no part of God's original plan, is not to be found in prophecy. They regard the Church as the "mystery" to which St. Paul many times refers. This view is held to justify the Futurist attitude,—that no fulfilment of prophecy is to be looked for in anything that happens during the Christian dispensation.

So many people have come to think that this view is the true one, that it is worth while, instead of at once dismissing it as absurd, to consider carefully how it comes to be held at all. This involves the study of three questions: (1) What is the true meaning of the "mystery" of St. Paul's Epistles? (2) What is the value of the other arguments offered for a supposed "suspension" of God's purposes? (3) In what aspect is the Church to be looked for in prophecy?

I. The word *mystery*, which occurs 28 times in the New Testament, is simply the Greek word μυστήριον in English form. It means a *secret* that needs to be *revealed*, or a *symbol* that needs to be *interpreted*.

In the Apocalypse, it is used only in the latter sense. The "Seven Stars," and the "Woman Babylon," are symbols needing interpretation: and the interpretation is given (Rev. i. 20: xvii. 5, 7). The "mystery of God," to be *finished* at a certain time, is a *symbol* then first to be *understood* (Rev. x. 7).

In the Gospels, the word is used of the spiritual truths of Christianity, *secrets* at first understood

only by the disciples. In two passages out of the three, it is in the plural ; and this makes the meaning unmistakable (Matt. xiii. 11 : Mark iv. 11 : Luke viii. 10). St. Paul uses the plural three times, and in each case the meaning is the same as it is in the Gospels (1 Cor. iv. 1 : xiii. 2 : xiv. 2).

In some cases the word is used by St. Paul of things "mysterious" in the modern sense of the word : thus he applies it to *marriage*, to *Israel's unbelief*, and to the *resurrection-change* (Eph. v. 32 : Rom. xi. 25 : 1 Cor. xv. 51).

There remain 14 verses in which St. Paul uses the word in a more or less special way, and in the singular. The question is, does he use it with any fixed meaning?

The passage first claiming attention is 1 Tim. iii. 16 ; "Great is the mystery of godliness, who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory" (R.V., but without *He*, which is not in the Greek).[1]

Here, evidently, the "mystery of God" is *the personal and historical Christ.* There is no suggestion of the Church, or of the Gentiles, or even of the Gospel. It is simply Christ, as the Son of God.

The early copyists could not understand how τὸ μυστήριον, a neuter word, as of a thing inanimate, could mean a Person, so they put "God" in place of "Who," Θεος instead of ὅς:

[1] "Mystery" is a neuter word ; "who" is *masculine*, though it should agree with "mystery" and be *neuter* : so the R.V. has put "He who."

for in the earliest manuscripts, written wholly in capitals, with words abbreviated, there was only the difference of a stroke between ΟΣ and ΘΣ; ὁς and Θεος.

The translators of the Authorised Version had the same difficulty, and so accepted this amendment, and rendered, "God was manifest." The Revisers did better: but even they were afraid to be quite literal, and to translate the words as St. Paul wrote them: for the "mystery of godliness" is *Christ Himself*, though the word μυστήριον is neuter and inanimate,—just as τὸ πνεῦμα, which is also neuter and inanimate, is the usual name for the Holy Spirit.

The word is used with exactly the same meaning in three verses of the Epistle to the Colossians (Col. i. 26, 27; ii. 2).

In the first of these, the *mystery* is the *Word of God;* but the words that follow show that neither the Gospel, nor the Bible, is intended, but Christ Himself, the "Word made flesh." So, also, in the next verse, "this mystery, among the Gentiles," is "Christ, among you,"—the word for *among* is the same in both cases,—so that the *mystery* is simply *Christ;* for those to whom St. Paul was writing were Gentiles. And a few verses further on, in another passage whose true meaning has been recovered by the literal translation of the Revisers, the "mystery of God" is "Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden."

In four other passages, the word will bear the same meaning. In 1 Cor. ii. 1, the *mystery of God* is "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." In 1 Cor. ii. 7, the "wisdom of God, in mystery"; *hidden*, but *reserved for us*, is evidently the "Lord of

Glory," who was crucified (compare 1 Cor. 1. 24). In Eph. vi. 19, St. Paul is an "ambassador" for the "mystery of the Gospel," that is, for *Christ*. In Rom. xvi. 25, the "preaching of Jesus Christ," is the "revelation of the mystery," long hidden, now revealed.

Thus St. Paul, in eight passages, speaks of *Christ* as *the mystery* of God; without including any thought of the Church, or of the calling of the Gentiles, or even of the Gospel message.

Christ was a new revelation (though His coming had been a subject of prophecy), when He came into the world, bringing life and immortality to light. But the Church and the Church-period were not hidden secrets, for the first time revealed *then;* or, a little later by St. Paul; but only a new stage of advance in the revealed purposes of God; the Kingdom of Heaven of our Lord's Parables; the first stage of the Kingdom of the Stone that struck the Great Image, and broke it to pieces.

II. Among other arguments which are used for making the Church period an *interval* in God's prophetic purposes, are four which may be shortly dealt with.

(*a*) An argument is drawn from the prophecy of the "Seventy Weeks" of Daniel ix.

The whole prophecy has, by the common consent of Christians, been taken to refer to the Messiah, His ministry of three and a half years, to Jews only, His death, the preaching of the Gospel for a short time afterwards to Jews only; and then, at *the end of the war*, that is, beyond the seventy weeks period, the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple by the soldiers of a Roman Prince.

Instead of thus considering the prophecy to be wholly fulfilled, Futurists apply the latter part to the doings of a future Antichrist, and thus interpose a gap of many centuries between the two parts of the fulfilment. Yet "seventy weeks," or 490 years, are declared to be "*cut off*," as from a tape measure, as the *limit of the period.*

The only excuse that can be found for thus dislocating the prophecy is in the meaning of the word "He," occurring three times in the last verse. It is made to refer to Antichrist, who is identified with the "Prince that shall come."

It is grammatically possible to make the pronoun refer to the "Prince"; but the indications of the passage are against it, for *Messiah* is the main subject throughout. In an exactly similar construction, found in 2 Thess. ii. 8, 9, the same principle could not be applied without leading to absurdity. There the main subject is Antichrist, and no one has suggested that in the sentence, "the brightness of His coming, whose coming is after the working of Satan," *whose* and *His* refer to the same person,—though grammatically they should do so.

It was *Christ* who "confirmed the covenant" with many of the Jews during the few years in which they were given so unique an opportunity (Matt. xi. 12; Acts xxi. 20). The prophecy was wholly fulfilled before the end of the first century; and it has no bearing whatever on the Church period.

(*b*) Arguments are also drawn from the Apocalypse, but they are based entirely on the supposed special use of two common phrases. One is "the Lord's day," found first in the Apocalypse, then commonly in early Christian

writings, of the *Christian Sunday*, and differing in form from the expressions used for the future "Day of the Lord."

The other is the phrase μετὰ ταῦτα, which occurs twice in Rev. iv. 1. It means simply "after this" or "after these things," when one event immediately follows another. The *vision* followed the dictation of the Seven Epistles: the *contents* were to describe the conditions which would follow those described in the Seven Epistles; that is to say, were to deal with the Church period. This phrase occurs very often.

There is no reason for making the Lord's Day into the future "Day of the Lord," nor for making μετὰ ταῦτα mean "after this dispensation."

(*c*) An argument is drawn from the text used by our Lord in the synagogue of Nazareth. A part only of the sentence in Isa. lxi. 1-3 is quoted in the passage; and then it is said "He closed the book, and sat down" (Luke iv. 28). It is argued that the part quoted was in act of fulfilment, while the next clause "the day of vengeance of our God" is still future, after many centuries.

But it is not stated that our Lord stopped at that point; enough is quoted to identify the passage, that is all. An exactly similar case is found in Acts viii. 32, 33, where enough is quoted to identify the passage as Isa. liii., and the quotation stops, as in the former case, in the middle of a sentence.

Moreover, what follows in Isa. lxi. has no reference to the future judgment, but to the comforting of mourners; and the "day of vengeance," which is really the "day of vindication"

of God, reveals just such a "vengeance" as God loves,—the heaping of coals of fire on the heads of His enemies (Rom. xii. 20). "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. v. 8).

The prophecy in Isa. lxi. 1-3 has no gap in it whatever, and no change of subject.

(*d*) An argument has been drawn from the difference between two reckonings of the period of the Judges.[1]

St. Paul, in Acts xiii. 18-21, gives the time of the Judges as "about 450 years." This figure is the natural one, as it is exactly the sum total of all the figures given in the Book of Judges, with the 40 years of Eli added (1 Sam. iv. 18). It makes no allowance for possible over-lapping, or for years of anarchy; but it is quite impossible to arrive at *exact* figures for the whole period from the data supplied in the Book of Judges. The period was, as St. Paul says, "about 450 years."

But in 1 Kings vi. 1, the interval between the Exodus and Solomon's Temple is given as 480 years: a figure which reduces the time for the *Judges* by 93 years.

The suggestion is, that this difference is due to the omission of those years during which Israel was under punishment, and so "out of covenant" with God. Five of the servitudes of Israel make up a total of 93 years: but *there was a sixth, of 18 years, which destroys the argument.* It is left out of the account, on the ground (1) that it was contemporaneous with the Philistine oppression, which was, as a matter of

[1] It would not be worthy of mention, but that it has the support of Sir R. Anderson (*Coming Prince*, p. 83), and of Mr. Pember (*Great Prophecies*, (*Israel*), p. 366 to 370.)

fact, 31 years later (Judg. xiii. 1): and (2) that it only affected the tribes on the East of Jordan, though the passage suggests that the whole of Israel suffered (Judg. x. 8, 9).

Time-measurements so doubtful in themselves, and so arbitrarily used, can be of no value as evidence for anything. The discrepancy between the two passages is doubtless due to the frequent overlapping of the periods mentioned, and to the use of round numbers in describing them.

3. The question remains, in what aspect is the Church likely to appear in prophecy?

The Gospels and Epistles regard the Church of Christ from within, and ignore the world outside. They fully explain its doctrine, and its relations with God. Prophecy, on the other hand, so far as it is concerned with *prediction*, has to do with the Church as a factor entering into the world's history.

The predictions of the Old Testament, especially those in the Book of Daniel, deal with the history of Israel, and of the States with which Israel came in contact. In the same way, Christian prophecy would be likely to describe the destinies of the Church of Christ among the nations, both as a secret influence undermining Satan's power, and as an organisation existing alongside of secular States, and sometimes controlling them.

But the outward organisation will never, in prophecy, be confused with the true Church of Christ, which is made up of genuine Christians. It will be recognised as a Church, for the sake of its true members: but the figures that describe it will not spare its sins.

So it comes about, that there are in the

Apocalypse three "Churches," symbolised by female figures: the Jewish Church, first seen as a glorious figure, but afterwards, having rejected and crucified Christ, described as a mere hunted fugitive (Rev. xii.): the Roman Church, seen at its worst, as an abandoned woman, sinning with the kings of the earth, and having nothing but its female form to indicate that it is a Church at all (Rev. xvii.): and the true Church, the Bride of Christ, seen only at the moment of His Coming, and then seen in holiness and purity (Rev. xix. 7-9: compare xxi. 2, 9); for at that moment, and not before, all genuine Christians will be separated from the rest of mankind, and caught up to meet the returning Lord (1 Thess. iv. 17).

The Church of Christ is not only found in Christian prophecy; it is the main subject of Christian prophecy. Secular history is dealt with, but only when it directly concerns the destinies of the Church. And prophecy brings out the truth, that Church history and secular history are alike over-ruled by God for the perfecting of the individual believer.

It is inconceivable that the one Book of prophecy given to the Christian Church should pass over the Christian dispensation, and occupy itself with a time when all true Christians shall have been taken from the earth to their reward. The Ascended Lord would not thus have left Himself without witness, in vision and prophecy, for eighteen centuries of struggle, faith, and patience on the part of His servants. It is these centuries that are the main subject of "the Revelation of Jesus Christ."

NOTE L—ON HISTORICAL EVENTS AND DATES.

I. *Dates connected with the Four Empires.*

B.C. 606. BABYLONIAN EMPIRE: Dan. ii. 37, 38: vii. 4.

605. Seventy years captivity of Judah begins: Jer. xxv. 11, 12: Dan. ix. 2.

538. MEDO-PERSIAN EMPIRE: Dan. ii. 39: vii. 5: viii. 3. Fall of Babylon: Dan. v.

536. Decree of Cyrus, ending the captivity: Ezra i. 1.

459. Decree given to Ezra, to build: Ezra vii. 11.

444. Commission given to Nehemiah: Neh. ii. 5-8.

336. GREEK EMPIRE: Dan. ii. 39: vii. 6: viii. 5.

63. Palestine becomes subject to Rome: Rev. xii. 4.

27. ROME becomes an EMPIRE: Dan. ii. 40: vii. 7, 23: and enters into prophecy.

A.D. 29. The Crucifixion of Christ.

$69\frac{1}{2}$ weeks of years, *solar*, from Ezra.

$69\frac{1}{2}$ weeks of years, *lunar*, from Nehemiah.

32. End of the Seventy Weeks: Dan. ix.

70. Destruction of Jerusalem: Matt. xxiv. 21: Dan. ix. 26.

303. General persecution of Christians: Rev. vi. 8.

312 (to 331). Collapse of Paganism: Rev. vi. 12-17.

328. Seat of Empire removed to Constantinople: 2 Thess. ii. 7.

476. End of the Western Empire: Rev. viii. 12.

1453. End of the Eastern or Greek Empire: Rev. ix. 15.

Ezra's decree is usually dated 458 B.C.: but the indications found in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah point rather to 459 B.C., as the author has shown in his "*Divine Clues to Sacred Prophecy.*" The majority of writers date the Crucifixion as A.D. 29, which would exactly fulfil the prophecy, measuring from the dates given above for Ezra and Nehemiah: from the earlier date, in solar years: from the later, in lunar or sacred years.

Palestine became subject to Rome before Rome had become an Empire; the other fragments of the Greek Empire had been annexed earlier still; hence the peculiar wording of Rev. xii. 4—the Dragon's tail is seen to be "drawing" stars *already cast down.*

The dates given above include all that are necessary for the early period of Christianity, in connection with prophecy.

II.—*Dates connected with the Trumpet period.*

The periods which mark the gradual rise and decline of the Papacy as a political power have been indicated thus: its *rise*, the period between Cyprian, A.D. 257, and Phocas, A.D. 610: its *decline*, from Luther, A.D. 1517, to Victor Emmanuel, A.D. 1870. These two periods are separated by 1260 years; the beginning of the one from the beginning of the other, and the end from the end.

It would be interesting to follow in detail the progress of rise and of decline, but this cannot here be attempted, and it is not necessary to the student of prophecy, for the details are not predicted.

But prophecy is not silent about the centuries which are included in the Papal period. They are the time of the three "Woes" which afflict Christendom, under the fifth, sixth, and seventh Trumpets.

(1) The *first Woe* is connected with the rise of Mohammedanism, and the 150 years of Saracen aggression.

The starting-point of all Moslem history is the Hegira or Flight of Mohammed, in A.D. 622. From that date, for 150 years, the Arabs continued to extend their conquests, and remained a danger to Christendom. They were united, under a single Caliph, ruling from Damascus, until A.D. 755. In that year, a second Caliph was recognised in the West, and Africa revolted. Islam never again presented a united front to Christian Europe.

Two other events followed, contributing to the fulfilment of the prophecy. The Eastern Caliph removed his capital from Damascus to the new city of Bagdad, 500 miles further away from Europe, occupying it at some date between A.D. 764 and A.D. 774: and in A.D. 771 (the last year of the 150), Charlemagne began his long reign as sole ruler of France. Under him, Christian Europe became once more, for a time, a single Empire, and had nothing to fear from external enemies. The Arab menace was at an end.

Thus accurately do the "five months" of the prophecy measure the duration of the Saracen invasions. Within a few years of the close of the predicted period (for 150 years are symbolised), the unity of Islam was finally broken up, and the most powerful of the Moslem rulers was removed three weeks' journey further away

from Europe: and exactly at its close began the reign of a sovereign in Christendom, "one of the greatest sovereigns who ever lived," who was destined to revive the Western Empire, and to give to the West a unity and strength which it had not known since the days of Constantine.

(2) *The Second Woe* is connected with the Turks, and began from the time of their activity on behalf of Mohammedanism.

During the three centuries which come first, and are not referred to in the prophecy, the power of the Arabs continued to decline, and that of the Turks, whom they employed more and more in their armies, continued to increase. Before long, the Turks, like the Barbarians in the service of the Roman Empire, began to take the power into their own hands, and to appoint and depose their rulers. The Moslem States reached, during that time, their highest point of civilisation and prosperity; but they did not seriously threaten Europe, until, in A.D. 1063, Alp Arslan, the second Seljuk Sultan, began to reign at Bagdad. He was the first to lead the Turks as protector of Islam against the Eastern Empire. The Ottoman Empire was not founded, properly speaking, till in the year 1299 the Ottomans became independent of the Seljuks, and succeeded them in their power: but the Turkish menace to Europe was never absent during the Seljuk period, from A.D. 1063 to A.D. 1299: and the period is very nearly that of the Crusades, which exhausted Christendom and weakened the resistance of the Eastern Empire (A.D. 1095 to A.D. 1270).

The taking of Constantinople, in A.D. 1453, completes the prophetic period of 391 years

(a *year* and a *month* and a *day*) from the accession of Alp Arslan in A.D. 1063, if the reckoning is made in the Eastern way, that is, inclusively: it is, properly speaking, 390 years.

(3) Attached to the second Woe is the *Reformation period.* Its events followed, and were closely connected with, the aggression of the Turks.

For the events of the early part of this period, Ranke's *History of the Reformation in Germany* is available, and is trustworthy. Written from an independent standpoint, it brings out the critical importance of the events which, in this commentary, have been referred to as fulfilling prophecy.

Among these are (1) Reuchlin's vindication of the Jews and their Scriptures, silencing the accusations of the Dominicans, who proposed that the Inquisition should be set up against them: it is described as the first victory of the new principles, A.D. 1508-1514 (Ranke, *Eng. Translation* (1905), pp. 134-139): (2) Luther's Theses, considered as a real starting-point of the Reformation itself, A.D. 1517 (pp. 143-153): (3) the Papal Bull against Luther, as important enough to decide not only Luther, but Germany, against the Papacy, A.D. 1520 (pp. 211-216): (4) the sack of Rome by a Protestant army, for nine months, as permanently affecting Rome's prestige, A.D. 1527 (pp. 429-445): an event so remarkable, that Gibbon devotes a long passage to it, though it is outside his subject.

The Apocalypse predicts these opening events, and then passes to the end of the period, and the political establishment of Protestantism, by

the Peace of Ryswick, A.D. 1697.[1] Two things are symbolised, as leading to that settlement: the "fall" of "the tenth of the city," and the slaying of 7000 "names of men" (Rev. xi. 13).

It has been suggested in this commentary that the first of these predictions found its fulfilment in the "falling" of England from allegiance to the Papacy: one of the ten kingdoms falling away to Protestantism, *captured*, as it were, by it. This was *completed* in A.D. 1688.

The second phrase, "there were killed in the earthquake seven thousand *names* of men,"—may be equally definite, and symbolise the Seven Dutch Provinces, which were recognised by Spain in A.D. 1648, as a Protestant state, after long years of heroic struggle and suffering.[2] For the heroism of the Dutch resistance to the forces of the Papacy was a decisive factor in the long struggle: and the Dutch Republic gave England, at a critical moment, the sovereign under whom it was finally established as a Protestant power. "Names of men" cannot be *killed*, literally: but they can be *struck off a list.* In spite of tremendous efforts on the part of the Papacy, the Seven Provinces were finally struck off the list of countries under the Roman obedience.

III. *Some Books of Reference.*

The fulfilment of sacred prophecy has already covered a period of twenty-five centuries of history. It may be well to suggest a few of the

[1] See page 165, *note.*

[2] Described in Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic.*

books in which the widely-scattered facts which have to do with that fulfilment may best be found.

Only the bare facts are needed, with some idea of their relative importance. Consequently, the articles in a condensed cyclopædia, such as *Harmsworth's*, or the pages of synoptical tables, like the *Oxford Chronological Tables of History* (A.D. 1837), are of more use for the study of prophecy than most modern histories: for these are nearly always written to illustrate some theory of history. Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is a storehouse of facts about the history of Rome, both East and West, from the end of the first century: just because he gives the *facts*, without much more than passing comment. But on all that has to do with the direct influence of religion, whether Christian or Mohammedan, Gibbon is unreliable, because *all religion* is outside his experience, and is the object of his "celebrated sneer."

For earlier dates and events, so far as they are not to be gathered from Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, the older books are best, especially the two small volumes of Prof. Birks on the *Visions of Daniel.*

For the authenticity of the Book of Daniel itself, which is of great importance to the right understanding of the Apocalypse, as the foundation on which its most important symbolism is built up,—Pusey's Lectures on *Daniel the Prophet* (A.D. 1864) still retain their value, and remain unanswered, though the arguments of Prof. J. Kennedy (in the "*Book of Daniel*," A.D. 1898) and other good writers are more up-to-date. The external evidence for the Book

of Daniel is quite satisfactory, and the internal evidence which is supplied by the *actual fulfilment of its prophecies* is overwhelming.

There are many good histories of the early period of Christianity. For the early period of Mohammedanism, there are the writings of Sir William Muir. On the beginnings of the Reformation, Ranke's *History of the Reformation in Germany* provides all that is needed. On the French Revolution, Thiers' *History* is long, but is written with full personal knowledge. Summaries of the events of that period abound.

It is difficult to find good recent books on the subject of the *fulfilment of prophecy*. Most of the books written on the prophecies, in recent years, are so infected with the German heresy, that they do not look for fulfilments at all. And among those that accept a genuine historical interpretation, there is often too close a following of the lead of E. B. Elliott, whose four large volumes,—*Horae Apocalypticae*,—while they are a monument of scholarly research, accurate quotation, and genuine piety, include long sections devoted to the support of interpretations which are untenable, and have repelled many from the study of fulfilled prophecy.

NOTE M—ON THE THOUSAND YEARS, OR MILLENNIUM.

There has been much controversy with regard to the reign of a thousand years, which is predicted in the twentieth chapter of the Apocalypse.

The symbolic language in which previous chapters have been written is here dropped, and

certain predictions are made in plain words, though they contain allusions to the Dragon and the Beast, which are symbolic figures. The meaning of the Dragon is *here* so carefully explained, as "the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan," that all its symbolism is removed: and the Beast is only indirectly referred to at all. The change of style is no doubt due to the change of subject; for the predictions found in this chapter relate to the consequences of the Second Advent, and that event will remove all need of concealment of things future.

The prophecy may be thus summarised:— Satan's power to tempt mankind will cease for a thousand years, a period mentioned six times in plain words. During that time Christ and His saints, or some of them, raised from the dead, will *reign:* another passage makes it possible to add, *over the earth* (Rev. v. 10). At the end of the thousand years, the old conditions will for a short time be restored: many will rebel, but only to be destroyed by fire from heaven. Then, and not before, will come the general resurrection, the final judgment, and the eternal state. Earth will have done its work, and a *new earth* will take its place.

The prophecy raises many difficult questions, but it is perfectly straightforward, and it may be shown to combine in a wonderful way the various predictions of coming happiness on earth, and reward in heaven, of which earlier prophecy is so full.

The real question at issue is not connected with these questions, as such, but with the authority of the Apocalypse to deal with them, and to solve them. It is easily stated, though it

has been much obscured by side-issues. It amounts to this:—Is the Apocalypse what it claims to be, or is it not?

For if the Book is what it claims to be, it is the highest authority possible for any statement or any prediction. It is nothing less than the Book of Jesus Christ, solemnly revealed through the last of the Apostles, as a parting gift from the ascended Lord to guide His servants through the difficult times that lay between those early days and His own return. It might well contain predictions of things not revealed in earlier prophecy.

But if, on the other hand, the Book is not what it claims to be, but a work of Christian imagination, describing things not really seen or heard in heavenly vision,—then its predictions have no independent authority, but must be checked by reference to the Gospels and Epistles, and anything not found in them must be rejected, or explained away.

This attitude towards the Apocalypse has been widely adopted, almost unconsciously. Thus Bishop Waldegrave, who devoted a whole series of Bampton Lectures to the subject of the Millennium, started out with the assumption that the Gospels and Epistles must needs "take precedence" of the Apocalypse: by which he meant, as his lectures show, that nothing in the Apocalypse may be so understood as to mean something not already found in the Gospels and Epistles. As a consequence, he was bound to reject the plain meaning of the predictions here found: (1) that Christ's coming will introduce on earth a thousand years of happiness for mankind; (2) that at the end of

that time, Satan will be allowed again to tempt, that is, to test, the living nations, before the eternal state begins. But in doing so, he found himself obliged to adopt the wholly impossible theory, that the thousand years were the years preceding the Reformation, and the *little season* of Satan's renewed activity, the centuries which have succeeded it: and this while claiming to be a good Protestant, and regarding the Reformation as an unmixed blessing. His dilemma was simply due to a wrong attitude towards the Apocalypse.

Those who lived in the first three centuries made no such mistake. Their ideas about the nature of the Millennium were often fanciful, but they accepted it without question, simply because it was plainly predicted in the Apocalypse. Their agreement on this point has been described as the most remarkable instance of the "unanimous consent of the Fathers."[1]

It was only when carnal ideas about the conditions during the Millennium were put forward by heretics, who professed to find them in the Apocalypse, that the Millennium was discredited, and with it the Apocalypse itself. The process was completed by the worldly success of Christianity in the days of Constantine, which obscured the hope of the Lord's return.

In this commentary, which is based upon a whole-hearted acceptance of the claim and authority of the Apocalypse, it is only necessary to take the plain prediction of the thousand years, and try to understand its meaning, in the

[1] By Dean Alford, in his *Greek Testament.*

light of earlier prophecy. The result will be set out in the fewest possible words.

(1) The position of the prophecy, immediately following that of the Second Advent, indicates the true order. Christ's return brings in the Millennium.

This agrees with Christ's words about the *regeneration* of the world (Matt. xix. 28); and about the *Kingdom* appointed for the Apostles (Luke xxii. 30); and with St. Peter's words about *times of refreshing*, and the *restoration of all things* (Acts iii. 19): for in each case Christ evidently comes first, and in each case the reference is to earthly, and not heavenly, conditions.

(2) The Second Advent is also the signal for the First Resurrection, which is for God's servants only (Rev. xx. 4, 5).

This agrees with Christ's words about those who are counted worthy to obtain the resurrection, and the *age* or dispensation to which it leads (Luke xx. 35); and with St. Paul's words about the resurrection from among the dead, the ἐξανάστασις, at which he aimed (Phil. iii. 10): and with the plain words of St. Paul about the resurrection of the dead in Christ, at His coming (1 Thess. iv. 16, 17).

The doctrine of a special resurrection for the people of God is found, with more or less definiteness, throughout the Bible. It is enough to mention the reference to a *better resurrection*, (Heb. xi. 35), to the *resurrection of the just* (Luke xiv. 14), and the resurrection of *those in Christ* (1 Cor. xv. 23), in addition to the passages already noticed.

(3) Christ and His risen Saints will then reign

over the earth (ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, Rev. v. 10), not on it. That is, they will exercise effective control over the living nations. There is no suggestion that during the Millennium heavenly and earthly beings are mingled together.

Such a reign will fulfil many prophecies: The kingdom under the whole heaven is to be given to the saints (Dan. vii. 27): the meek shall inherit the earth (Matt. v. 5); the Apostles are to sit on thrones, judging the tribes of Israel (Matt. xix. 28): the saints are to judge the world (1 Cor. vi. 2): those who overcome now are to share Christ's throne (Rev. iii. 21): Christ is to reign till He has put all enemies under His feet (1 Cor. xv. 25).

(4) The actual conditions, during the Millennium, may be partly understood.

The risen saints will be with Christ, wherever He is (1 Thess. iv. 17), in glorified bodies like His own. Though, perhaps, seen at first by living men (as Christ was seen for forty days after His resurrection), they will probably soon leave the world (as Christ did) and show themselves no more: but they will rule over the world, with Christ, from heaven.

The men of earth will die, as now, for death is the last enemy to be destroyed, and continues until Christ's kingdom is handed over to the Father, and the eternal state begins (1 Cor. xv. 26, 24). This is the order found also in the Apocalypse: death is not ended till after the Millennium (Rev. xx. 14).

At present, Satan is actively tempting mankind, and man's corrupt nature tempts him also. During the Millennium, only man's corrupt nature will remain to tempt him, and he will be

surrounded with good influences. War will be at an end (Isa. ii. 4).

(5) The purpose of the Millennial age will be to vindicate and complete the work of Christ, in relation to the world.

Satan's power in the world has been reduced, and God's power has increased, step by step, in human history. But Satan is still *the prince of the world* (John xiv. 30), *the god of this world*, or age (2 Cor. iv. 4), *the prince of the power of the air* (Eph. ii. 2),—until Christ returns, and takes His rightful place, ruling over a redeemed earth. The Millennial age is the last stage in the history of redemption.

It is also a last chance for unbelieving Israel. No true Jew will be able to resist the evidence for Christ afforded by the consequences of the Second Advent. Left behind on earth, while all true Christians are with Christ in glory, the Jews must needs become missionaries to the world. So much is clear: all else is mere speculation, and to be avoided.

(6) The *coming age* is limited to a thousand years. That this period is to be taken literally, is shown by its repetition, six times, in plain words. This is in sharp contrast with the way in which some other prophetic periods are expressed: especially the *three and a half year* period, which is never so described, but always in an unusual way, as *time, times, and a half*, or 42 months, or 1260 days. That is because it is a symbol for a longer period, unlike the thousand years of peace.

St. Peter's words, "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. iii. 8), may be intended as a hint, of

which the writer was himself unconscious, that the "day of the Lord" would last a thousand years. St. Peter is speaking of that "day," and of the new heaven and new earth which are to follow it. Only one thing is needed to make his outline agree with the fuller outline given in the Apocalypse, and that is, the introduction of the thousand years of earthly blessing between the Second Coming and the eternal state; in other words, the extension of his "day of the Lord" to a thousand years, which shall *end* in the "flood of fire" of which he speaks. This truth was reserved to be revealed through St. John, thirty years later; but St. Peter was led to write words which can now be seen to be a hint of what would afterwards be revealed.

There have been, from quite early times, advocates of an idea that the earth would see six thousand years of conflict, followed by a thousand years of peace, brought in by Christ's return. The idea has nothing but analogy to support it; the rest-day after six working days; but it might prove to be a true one. From the date assigned in Genesis to man's creation, to the present time, is somewhere about 6000 years; the chronology cannot be accurately determined, and in any case, no argument can be founded upon it.

(7) The coming age is to end in a return, for a time, to the old conditions, in order to test mankind. This is the second point newly revealed in the Apocalypse. Satan, chained for a thousand years, is loosed out of his prison, at the end, and goes out to deceive the nations.

It is in accordance with God's ways in creation, as well as in Redemption, that the nations who have enjoyed such easy conditions of service,

should be tested as to their real allegiance: but it is not clear why the test should be applied only at the end.

Each "day" of creation was a long period of quiet testing, suggested by the words in Genesis, "God saw that it was good," and by the scientific theory of the "survival of the fittest." Each "day" ended in catastrophe, and in the setting up of new conditions.

It has been the same in God's dealings with mankind. His "days" have been dispensations; times of quiet testing, ending always in catastrophe, and in the setting up of new conditions.

That the "day of the Lord," the last of the dispensations, the Thousand Years, should end in Catastrophe, is in keeping with all the rest of the history of creation and of man.

Through all that long history, God has been working His purpose out, step by step. In this last catastrophe, He separates good from bad in the final harvest of the earth, before the curtain falls on the tragedy of human history, and the mystery of evil is for ever ended.

NOTE N—ON CROWNS AND DIADEMS.

Two Greek words are used for *crown* in the Apocalypse: στέφανος, the laurel crown of victory, and διάδημα, the diadem of royalty.

The first is used of honour which is *heavenly* and *spiritual:* the second, of authority over the *affairs of earth.*

Thus the first is used of the Church of Smyrna (Rev. ii. 10), and Philadelphia (Rev. iii. 11), of the twenty-four Elders (Rev. iv. 4), of the *Gospel*

rider in the first Seal (Rev. vi. 2), of the Daughter of Sion, as first seen (Rev. xii. 1), and of the Angel in the cloud (Rev. xiv. 14). In each of the six cases the honour is of a spiritual kind, and carries with it no earthly authority.

The second word is used of the Dragon (Rev. xii. 3), of the Beast (Rev. xiii. 1), and of *Christ at His Second Coming* (Rev. xix. 12). In each of these three cases, the authority is *over the affairs of earth.* There is in fact nothing else in common between the Dragon and the Beast, on the one hand, and the returning Christ, on the other. Christ comes back to "rule the nations"; to take the power, as King of kings, which was usurped in turn by the Dragon and the Beast, in His absence.

There is only one other case of the use of the word *crown* in the Book, and that is in the description of the Locust-horsemen (Rev. ix. 7). They had on their heads what *looked like* crowns, and, *seemed like* gold. The word for crown is στέφανος. There may be here simply a suggestion of the *yellow turbans* of the Saracen horsemen: or, taking the words in a symbolic sense, they may indicate *fanatical enthusiasm for a false religion;* for that is a spurious imitation of the *spiritual devotion*, which would be symbolised by *real crowns* (στέφανοι) of *real gold*, such as mark out the true servants of God in the Apocalypse.

NOTE O—ON PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION.

In the interpretation of a Book so unique as the Apocalypse, it is well to be unfettered by rules derived from other sources. The Apocalypse is unlike any other Book in the Bible, except, in part, the Book of Daniel. It shows complete independence, making free use of earlier Scripture, and yet *never quoting*. Other "Apocalypses" are worse than useless as a help in interpretation. If any *special* principles of interpretation are applicable, they must be obtained from the study of the Book itself.

It is best to read and re-read it, using commentaries, but testing every suggestion by reference to the text. The Book is not sealed (Rev. xxii. 10): its fulfilment certainly began in St. John's time, and much has happened since then in connection with the Christian Church. The meaning of much of the Apocalypse ought, by this time, to be revealed by its fulfilment.

There are, however, certain *general* principles of interpretation to be followed. The reading of several hundred commentaries on the Book suggests that these principles should be stated, by way of caution, but at the end rather than the beginning. Otherwise, they might only deter the reader from the study of the Book, by impressing upon him the difficulty of his task: for one or other of them is missed by nearly every commentator.

(1) A definite belief is needed, that God is not only able to predict future events, but that He has actually done so in the Bible, and especially in the Apocalypse.

Many writers tacitly assume that the Book is only a Christian forecast, based upon the events and expectations of the moment.

(2) There must be also a readiness to accept God's estimate of the relative importance of events, as shown by His choice of things predicted.

The casting of lots upon Christ's robe is a subject of prophecy, while all the years of Christ's life at Nazareth are passed over. Some of the things predicted in the Apocalypse owe their importance, in the same way, to their connection with a moment of crisis.

(3) It is also necessary that the reader should take a broad view of God's purposes, as including, *even in this age*, both Jew and Christian. God does not "suspend" a covenant once ratified.

Some writers apply the whole Book to the destinies of a Jewish remnant: others explain away its references to Israel altogether. The truth is to be found between the two extremes. Both Jew and Christian have a place in the Apocalypse.

(4) A recognition of the progressive nature of prophecy is important. Later prophecies are fuller and clearer than earlier ones. The Apocalypse is the latest, fullest, and clearest of all.

It is, therefore, a mistake to allow the interpretation of the Book to be interfered with by the supposed meaning of the earlier prophecies, such as that on the Mount of Olives. These should rather be interpreted by means of the Apocalypse.

(5) Details which are alike in their form must be interpreted consistently with one another.

This applies particularly to the first four members of each of the three series,—Seals, Trumpets, and Vials.

In this commentary, the four Seals are all taken as of *spiritual warfare*, the figures being in each case *personifications:* the four Trumpets all relate to *hostile invasions:* the four Vials, to successive effects of the *same* revolutionary outbreak.

(6) Analogy must never be allowed to override the plain meaning of a symbol. Thus the fact that war, famine, and pestilence, are often found together, is no proof that the third Seal has to do with *famine*, a meaning which the wording expressly excludes.

The place of analogy is rather to be found in the light which fulfilled prophecy throws on the *nature of the fulfilment* of prophecies which are still unfulfilled.

(7) Landmarks of interpretation should be looked for and used: as, for example, the Man-Child, the seven hills of Rome, and the Rider on the white horse.

Many have been led astray by catchwords, such as the *great tribulation*, which is not used of one particular time of trouble, but has a different application every time it occurs.

(8) Interpretation should follow the nature of a prophecy, and have an eye to proportion. It should be precise where the prophecy is precise, indefinite where it is indefinite; and should not find the fulfilment of a whole chapter in a single year; or of one verse, in the religious conditions of centuries.

Thus *a thousand years*, six times plainly stated, in six consecutive verses, must be taken quite

literally: while *time, times, and a half*, seven times referred to in roundabout ways, must be taken figuratively, as a time-symbol: and "about the space of half an hour," can only mean a short unmeasured interval. So also, the space and importance given to Babylon, in the Apocalypse, shows it to be an *age-long* enemy to Christ and Christianity, not a tyranny lasting only for a few years, at the end. Such relative values can be better estimated in the twentieth century than was possible in the second.

(9) Great caution is necessary in connection with everything that is still future. That which lies between us and the Second Advent is mercifully hidden from our knowledge, though it may be predicted: and the conditions which that great event will introduce are so different from anything in our experience, that it is well to keep very close indeed to the figurative language by means of which those conditions are described.

(10) The interpretation of prophecy can never be an exact science. The grammar of prophecy is ecstatic, its language is figurative, its numbers are round numbers.

Thus it is quite unnecessary to be still looking for "ten kings" as successors to the old Roman Empire, on the ground that an exact division into ten kingdoms has not yet taken place. The Roman Empire came to an end, so far as its proper territory was concerned, in the fifth century; and its place has ever since been occupied by a group of states, which have fulfilled the prophecy of *tenfold* division, with far greater accuracy than has been the case with the *fourfold* division of the Greek Empire,—an

exactly parallel prophecy, the fulfilment of which in the past is not disputed.

(11) The connections which bind the Apocalypse to other parts of the Bible should be carefully followed: not as deciding either the purpose or the structure of the Book, but as illustrating the use of symbolic language, as providing the groundwork of wild-beast symbolism, and as showing the unity of the Bible, the Word of God.

The mark of Cain (Gen. iv. 15, Rev. vii. 2, 3), and the light on Moses' face (Exod. xxxiv. 29-35, Rev. vii. 2, 3) are interesting examples, usually overlooked, of the help to be found in the Old Testament.

(12) Above all, the Apocalypse must be believed when it speaks about itself. The honest acceptance of the plain statements made in the first and last chapters of the Book is rare in modern commentaries. Without it, the commentator can only display a "learned ignorance" of the real meaning of the Book. But if the acceptance of those statements is made the starting-point in its study, the promised blessing is assured.

A POSTSCRIPT—ON THINGS THAT MAY BE.

The Apocalypse has been interpreted, in the preceding pages, as already largely fulfilled. The predicted events of earth, which lead up to the Second Advent, appear to be so nearly at an end, that the nearness of the Advent itself becomes a practical question.

It has already been pointed out, that the time of the Second Advent was hidden from Christ

Himself, while He was on earth, and from His Apostles. It has been hidden from each generation of Christians since that time, though it appears *in its right place* in the scheme of the Apocalypse, and though the Apocalypse was more and more understood as time went on.

History, as these pages have shown, is full of examples of the fulfilment of Christian prophecy. But in none of these cases was the prediction rightly understood before its fulfilment. The victory of Christianity, for example, in the days of Constantine, though it is three times referred to in the Apocalypse, was the greatest possible surprise to the Church of that day. So also, in more recent times, though a crisis was expected by students of prophecy about the year 1866, it was the end of the age that was expected, rather than the end of the Papal Temporal Power. Men are not allowed to know beforehand, from prophecy, the events of earth, even though these are predicted. Thus to the limited knowledge of each age, the Second Advent has always been expected, as if near at hand.

The Christian student is not forbidden to look forward: unfulfilled prophecy is in fact a challenge to him to do so: but his expectations, however carefully formed, can only be personal and tentative. It is, however, possible that when the Advent is really near, the veil may in some degree be lifted, for those who reverently study prophecy.

There is no reason for supposing, as has been suggested by some of those who recognise fulfilments in past history, that the predictions of the Apocalypse are to be fulfilled, *more literally*, a second time. The idea of *double fulfilment* is

not supported by any clear examples: and even when understood in the modified sense of a *foreground* and a *background* to the fulfilment of prophecy, it does not apply to the Apocalypse. There is in this case no foreground. The vision was given as a direct prophecy of a long series of events, and the fulfilment has been on a national scale. It is quite out of the question that such a series should be repeated: more particularly if the repetition is to be on the scale of a few years only.

The following prophecies of earthly events remain, as it would seem, to be fulfilled, wholly or partially.

(1) A number of separate predictions, relating more particularly to Israel and to the Holy Land, are found in the Old Testament, and in part they refer to things still future. They are difficult to understand, and it is often hard to say whether the reference is to the present age, or to the Millennial age which is to follow, and which so closely concerns the people of Israel. Those which seem to refer to events lying between our own day and the Lord's return, suggest that the Jews will at that time be found once again in their own land: a prediction already sufficiently fulfilled, for Palestine has at this moment a population in which Jews predominate.

Except for those visions in the Book of Daniel which are marked out, even by the language in which they are written, as specially intended for Gentiles, Old Testament predictions throw little light on the meaning of the Apocalypse, which is our present subject. For the Christian, the Apocalypse takes precedence of all other prophecy.

(2) The Fall of Babylon, described in the eighteenth chapter of the Book, is not yet complete. It was in a spiritual sense fulfilled in the recovery of religious liberty at the time of the Reformation. It may find in the future a fulfilment, not indeed more literal, but more complete. In any case, at the end of this age, *great Babylon* is to *come into remembrance* for punishment.

(3) The *War of Armageddon* lies in the future. It may indeed have *begun* already, for no war has ever come so near to fulfilling the terms of the prediction, as the war now raging. No time-limit is given in the prophecy; but the war, when once it has begun, will only be ended by the Lord's return. It is in accordance with the indications of Old Testament prophecy, that it should centre around the Holy Land, the centre of God's earthly purposes: and the present war seems to be drifting in that direction.

(4) The activities of *the second Beast*, as predicted at the end of the thirteenth chapter, may be future, and not past. A fulfilment in the past has been suggested in this commentary: but it is not altogether satisfactory. The second half of the chapter seems to demand a fulfilment on the same world-scale as the first half. There are in it no marks of time or of continuity such as would confine it to the time of the Reformation, which is the subject of the chapter that follows.

It is suggested therefore as possible, that the Lamb-like Beast or False Prophet, which has in these pages been identified with the power of the Jesuit Order, is marked by *two horns* (*small*, as those on a lamb would necessarily be) as an indication that it will combine, for its own

purposes, the *Little Horn* of the East[1] with the *Little Horn* of the West[2]: the Papal and the Moslem powers. This combination, brought about by Jesuit influence, has in fact taken place, in the present war, for the first time in history. It is further suggested, that by means of this unholy alliance the second Beast has great success: that it uses that success to set up an Image or copy of the old Empire—the German-Roman Empire of the Kaiser's hopes: that within the limits of this empire, the Roman Church is once again, for a moment, given its old monopoly and power to persecute: and that these conditions, in view of Christ's promise that *the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church*, will bring Him back in power, and the Church and the earth, after their long time of suffering at the hands of evil powers, will in different ways enter into rest.

The hopes of earnest men for the peace and progress of the world have in these last years been rudely shattered. It may be that there are worse things still to come, in spite of all the hopes and prayers of Christian men: but whatever is in store in the immediate future, there is one certain end of all earthly troubles, and it may not now be long delayed—the *appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ*, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

[1] Dan. viii. [2] Dan. vii.

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